

The Three Amigos – Chapter 1 – New Beginnings

“What’s up partner?” Ron said answering the phone.

“Mark Twain once said, ‘Rumors of my death have been greatly exaggerated.’” Gary replied.

“Huh? I know we haven’t talked in a while Gar-Bear,” Ron said, “What are you talking about?”

“Just finished my latest story about an abrupt climate change scenario,” Gary explained. “I killed you and me off.”

“Thanks a bunch, partner,” Ron chuckled.

“You died of old age Ronald,” Gary explained, “But I got myself shot.”

“How old was I?” Ron asked.

“A month shy of 83,” Gary answered.

“So Clarence outlived both of us?” Ron asked.

“Somebody had to write our memoirs,” Gary answered.

“It has been a long time, hasn’t it,” Ron observed.

“October, 1992,” Gary recalled. “You ever finish The Ark?”

“Kind of strange reading a story where I’m in it,” Ron said, “Nope, never did.”

“Been to a meeting lately?” Gary asked.

“Still have the wing in the sling,” Ron said. “Nope. And I’m sure you haven’t had Sharon take you, right?”

“True, but with Amy and the kids back in the house while she goes through this divorce,” Gary responded, “Sharon is pretty short on time.”

“I can dig it,” Ron chuckled. “We still have our nightmare living with us, again.”

“Under foot all the time?” Gary asked.

“Stays in his room and sleeps all day,” Ron said.

“Well, I was just calling to say howdy,” Gary said signaling the end to the call.

“We’ll get to a meeting just as soon as I get my arm back,” Ron replied. “Ciao”

And that was what it was really like for The Three Amigos in Palmdale in the fall of 2004. Bush had just announced he was pulling 70,000 troops home from Europe and the Far East and, of course, Kerry was naturally saying that was all wrong. But if Bush had said he was keeping the troops where they were, Kerry would have said we should bring them home. According to most polls, it looked like Bush was going to have to come from behind to win reelection, too. That was a scary thought. That was just what the country needed, some liberal from Massachusetts as President. And, having watched a little coverage of the campaigns, Gary had concluded that John Edwards wasn’t much better. Not that Bush had been the perfect President, but his heart was in the right place, most of the time.

Gary didn’t agree with everything Bush stood for. Maybe Gary just had a liberal streak buried under that conservative veneer, but he didn’t see the harm in something like stem cell research. Anyone with half a brain knew that eventually the research would go forward and if not in the US, in Europe and Japan. It held great promise for the field of medicine. They might even come up with a cure for diabetes if they were allowed to really research. Gary checked all of his news sources looking for something he could base a story on. There wasn’t much there. The Laci Peterson trial was delayed, again. Didn’t matter if Scott did it or not, he was not going to get a fair trial. Crude oil hit record prices at \$48 a barrel, but another paper reported that despite the rise in gas prices, SUV sales were up 15%. The US was living life in the fast lane and this was all going to come to a screeching halt one of these days.

Even TV was in reruns. The only new show going was SG-1 and Stargate: Atlantis and Gary couldn’t decide if he liked the new show or not. He even checked the movie listings to see if there was a movie worth seeing, but there wasn’t. Anything that half interested him would be on cable soon enough. It was hell to be ‘middle aged’ and infirm. His friend Fleataxi gave him an idea for a story and he’d thought about it, but decided that the story of the three amigos would barely fill a page. There simply wasn’t much to tell. Clarence and Gary had gotten close when Gary sponsored Clarence’s nephew, Fred. Ron and Gary had a history, but there really wasn’t much interesting about it. For years, they’d worn cowboy boots and hats and gone to meetings. Some folks called them Bill and Dr. Bob. But with the turnover in the meetings, they hardly knew anyone anymore.

And so what if he didn’t start another story anyway? They accused him of being on a caffeine IV and knew nothing about his Energizer Bunny that kept him cranking out as many as 4 and sometimes even 5 chapters a day. He wasn’t on drugs, he was charged with electricity. At least his last story had earned a flashing asterisk that was a first. Using Microsoft Word to write stories just made it harder. Between the Spelling Checker and the Grammar Checker, and words like their, there and they’re, and to, two and too, you went nuts trying to write a story. Obviously the person who did those checkers

didn't understand plainspoken English. Did Microsoft secretly farm their programming out to India too?

Speaking of Microsoft, Sharon had asked him to download SP2 for Windows XP. Gary went into her sewing room and checked. SP2 wasn't available for download yet. He noticed Sharon's tape measure, the 50' one she'd bought to measure for last year's quilt show. Bored and with nothing to do, Gary took the tape to the back yard and measured from the shed to the tree, 23', and from the patio to the short wall for the bushes, 33'. He looked carefully at the lawn and realized that this half of the lawn was nothing but weeds.

Well, 20x30' was 600 ft² and that would make a very respectable shelter. The thing was, if he started a project like this, he was going to have to see it through or he'd never hear the end of it. Then he calculated the cost of putting in a foundation and slab. 600 square feet of concrete 4" thick was 200 cubic feet of concrete or about 7.4 yards. Plus, he guessed that he'd need a foundation about a foot wide and 6" thick for the 100' circumference. That was another couple of yards. He could get a load of concrete that big, 9.5 yards on one truck. It would cost him about 9.5x\$55 or \$522.50 for the concrete and another \$150 for a pump. And, he guessed that he could put in an 8' high wall around foundation for about \$30 a lineal foot so that was another \$3,000; plus another 7.5 yards of concrete for a roof, \$412.50 and another \$150 for a second concrete pump.

So, just putting a box in the ground would cost them about \$4,235, assuming he dug out that 33x23x8' of dirt by hand. That was almost 225 yards of packed, hard dirt. Assuming that he could get ¼ yard in a wheelbarrow, he probably couldn't pick it up and that was 900 wheelbarrows of dirt. And it was more likely that he'd be lucky to get 3 cubic feet of dirt in the wheelbarrow and that translated into 9x225 or 2,025 loads. Way back when he'd leveled the back yard, the guy had hauled away 5 truckloads of dirt for \$175. But Gary didn't want all the dirt hauled away, he just wanted some of it excavated and piled on his patio. After he had that box put in, he intended to pile all of that dirt back on top of the box as protection against radioactive fallout. But he couldn't do that either, that would make too high a pile of dirt.

"Sharon, I'd like to start a project," he'd told her.

"What kind of a project dear?" Sharon had asked.

"It doesn't make any darned sense to me not to have a storm shelter," he'd told her. "That's about half the reason I've always wanted to move back to Iowa."

"How big of a shelter are you talking about dear?" Sharon had asked.

"Twenty by thirty," he'd replied softly, ducking his head a little.

"Are you out of you mind?" she'd asked getting a look on her face that could have killed.

“Well, I measured the lawn,” he’d told her, “and that area back there that isn’t growing is about 23’ by 33’. I figured that I could transfer what little bit of sod was worth saving to the other side and fill in those blank spots. Then, I could dig down about 4’ or so and pile the dirt on the patio. After that, we’d be able to hire someone to excavate the next 6’ down.

“So, we’d have a big hole in the ground and what would that cost us?” she’d asked.

“I called an excavation contractor and he’d remove and haul the 169 yards of dirt for \$1,000,” Gary had explained. “And I’ve calculated that I would get the actual shelter put in with a combination of my labor and a contractor for about \$4,235.”

“So we’ve have a \$5,235 dollar hole in the ground?” she asked.

“Actually it would be a bit more,” he’d been force to admit. “We’d have to put in a stair-well, too. That would take another 8’ of wall plus 3’ for the end or about another \$330. But, I figured I could rototill in some compost and seed the covering over the hole after I got the dirt back in place so we’d have a full lawn.”

“What else have you been figuring out?” she’d asked. “Surely having an empty hole in the ground wouldn’t satisfy you. What about stairs and something to cover the entrance to the stairs?”

“I hadn’t gotten that far,” he’d been forced to admit.

“Assuming, and that’s just assuming I’d go along with a crackpot idea like this,” she’d said, “I suppose you’d have to get a piece of that scrap $\frac{3}{4}$ ” metal plate and figure some way to spring load it so you could get the plate open. Then you’d have to scrounge around for some used metal stairs or build your own out of wood.”

“I suppose you’re right,” he’d admitted. “And, I’ve have to put in some of that $\frac{3}{4}$ ” metal plate as a door at the bottom of the stairs, too.”

“If we got that far,” she’d said, “Assuming I’d go along, we have enough furniture in storage to outfit the shelter, but what would you do for power and cooking and the like?”

“How about one of those stove/refrigerator/sink combinations like they use in motels?” he’d asked, “Assuming you’d go along.”

“That might work,” She’d said, “If they came with an electric stove, and you put in a big enough generator to provide for the kitchenette and lights.”

“Well, I’ve been looking at diesel generators for all of those stories I’ve been writing,” he’d reminded her, “And we could put in a big enough generator and a 300-gallon fuel oil storage tank.”

“Gary,” she’d said with a tone that made him think the conversation was about to end, “You couldn’t get by with 300-gallons of fuel for a generator. You told me any number of times that in the case of a nuclear attack, we’d have to stay in a shelter for 340 some hours. How much fuel would it take to run a generator for 340 some hours?”

“Well,” he’d explained, “The home standby units are natural gas or LP vapor, at least those manufactured by Onan and Generac. The only way we could get a diesel standby unit would be to go with an Onan or Cummins. But you’d have to buy the transfer switch and all of that separately.”

“And how big a propane tank are you talking about?” she’d asked.

“Gee, I don’t know,” he’d been forced to admit, “Maybe 5,000-gallons.”

At this point in their discussion Gary sensed that Sharon was warming to his suggestion. Maybe not completely, but since she was getting into details, she must have some interest. One thing Gary’s research had shown was that the Onan and Generac generators ran on Natural Gas or LP Vapor. However, the Onan RS 12000 ran on both. Gary downloaded the installation and operator manuals and studied them. Conversion was as simple as inserting an orifice in a pipe and adjusting the carburetor. However, he would hate to do that in the dark. Maybe he could put in a Y-adaptor type valve and put in two of the intake pipes, one with the orifice and one without. Then, he’d be able to switch from gas sources with the turn of a valve. The RS 12000 ran \$3,999 and the transfer switch another \$642.86. Then there was the LP gas tank to buy, too. He would have preferred to rent one, but that would never do. A rental tank had to be 10’ away from any structure, not inside of the structure. A used 5,000 gallon tank would run \$7,500 plus shipping. Maybe Ron could find him a ‘deal’.

Now Gary might be slow, but he wasn’t stupid. And what Sharon didn’t know couldn’t kill him, yet. So he’d gone back to Sharon and had told her that he’d found the generator and tank but they didn’t need to think about that just yet. Sharon was engrossed in a quilt show on HGTV and she just sort of nodded at his comment. So, he’d then asked, “Can I go ahead with the project,” and she again nodded. Never look a gift horse in the mouth.

With permission granted, Gary stripped what little sod there was to move and began moving the dirt, wheelbarrow full by wheelbarrow full to the patio, starting at the rear and moving forward. It took him quite a while to move that dirt, but a few weeks later, he was ready for the excavating contractor to come in and take out the remaining 6’. He reminded Sharon that they had to have \$1,000 to get the dirt hauled away and she gave him one of ‘those’ looks, but agreed and told him not before the 28th of the month. Gary called the guy and scheduled the work for the 28th. That fella did in hours what had taken him weeks and he took out an extra two foot of dirt. Gary leveled out the bottom of the hole and started to dig for the foundation. Ron came by and told Gary that the foundation had to be a foot thick, not 6” and 2’ wide not 1’.

“Then you get your butt in this hole and help me dig, Ronald,” Gary said.

“I’d have to go home and change clothes,” Ron protested.

“I don’t care if you have to go home and have lunch,” Gary said, “You’re the one who wants this foundation twice as big so get a move on.”

Ron even brought back his own shovel and they got those holes 12” deep and 24” wide after a long day’s work. Of course that changed everything too. Now Gary needed a total of 12 yards of concrete for the foundation. He went back to Sharon and she told him after the 4th when the Iowa bank deposited the money he could get his concrete. That gave Ron, who was now officially drafted whether he liked it or not, and Gary time to build the forms. The problem was that a 2x4 wasn’t 4” and a 2x6 was too wide. But it was easier to use 2x6’s and move a little dirt. On the morning of the 5th, the concrete pump showed up followed ½ hour later by the concrete truck with 12 yards of concrete. Let me tell you, they really quickly discovered that they didn’t have much room to work. But, using a 2x4, they leveled the slab and then, using a large steel trowel on a pole he’d rented, they managed, somehow, to get a fairly decent finish on the slab. Gary told Ron he really appreciated the help but when it came time to put in the roof, Ron was going to have to help him out.

“Just what in the hell are you building here, Gar-Bear?” Ron asked, “It’s too deep for a swimming pool.”

“Ronald, old buddy, old pal,” Gary said, “I’m building a storm shelter.”

“Yeah, right, Gar-Bear,” Ron replied, “I know a bomb shelter when I see one.”

“Well then why did you ask?” Gary asked.

“Oh, I just wanted to see what you say,” Ron laughed. “Does Sharon have any idea how much this little project of yours is really going to cost before it’s all over?”

“Shush, don’t say that too loud, Ron,” Gary cautioned. “I figure to get it far enough along that she won’t have any choice except to continue.”

“You are positively suicidal,” Ron laughed.

“Maybe, but it’s worked so far,” Gary grinned.

“What’s next on the agenda?” Ron asked.

“About 111’ of concrete block walls,” Gary said. “At \$30 a lineal foot.”

“I see where you’re coming from,” Ron said, “By the time you’ve spent that much money, Sharon will be committed, won’t she?”

“Unless she has me committed, yes,” Gary agreed.

“You realize, I hope,” Ron said, “That putting in a concrete roof is going to take a lot of wood to support the plywood and the weight of that concrete roof I expect you’re planning on.”

“Yeah, I know Ronald,” Gary said, “But I thought I might ask Clarence to help us put it in.”

“You aren’t above abusing all of your friends, are you?” Ron commented.

“Me, abuse my friends? Whatever do you mean Ronald? When the bombs start falling, all of my friends are going to show up wanting in and people who haven’t helped out are going to have a real problem,” Gary replied.

“After the walls, what?” Ron continued.

“I’ve have to put in the propane tank, generator and the kitchenette before the roof goes on,” Gary pointed out.

“You’re really going to make it hard for us to put up proper supports for that roof, huh?” Ron remarked.

“Do I have any other choice?” Gary asked.

“I suppose not,” Ron admitted, “At least so far as the tank goes. The tank is about ten by four foot.”

“And the kitchenette is 60” wide, so that has to come in too,” Gary said.

“How big is the generator?” Ron asked.

“45” long by 34” wide,” Gary said, “But we will have to install the generator because of the intake and exhaust before we do the roof. And the installation manual says to leave 3’ free space on all sides of the generator so it can be serviced.”

“But we don’t have to install the tank, right?” Ron asked.

“We’ll have to put fuel pipes in the wall, but I suppose not,” Gary answered.

“Is this an LP or Natural gas generator?” Ron asked.

“Both and I’ve figured out how to plumb in both settings permanently,” Gary explained.

There was enough money left in the Iowa account to do the wall, Sharon said, but after

that, all money was going for Christmas presents. What did Gary want for Christmas if she had money left over? If she came up short, Sharon said, that hole in the ground was going to be his Christmas present. Well, if she had the money, Gary said, she could get him a Winchester Model 94, Legacy in .45 Colt. And if she didn't, the hole in the ground was just fine. Sharon wasn't stupid either and she had a pretty good idea how much that hole in the ground was going to end up costing. She figured in the neighborhood of \$15,000 minimum before it was all done. To date, Gary had spent \$1,000 on excavating, \$660 on concrete, \$150 for the pump and that wall was going to run \$3,330. He had \$5,140 committed to date. And, he hadn't bought the kitchenette nor had he said a word about how much the generator and tank were going to cost; probably \$4,500 for the generator, ? for the tank and \$2,500 for that kitchenette. There was also the roof and probably a bunch of survival food.

So far as the roof was concerned, from what Ron had said, Gary was rethinking this roof thing. It probably made more sense to put in some I-beams and a permanent ½" plate to support the roof. That way, he could avoid support posts eating up the floor space. Gary figured that he'd wall off a separate room for the generator and supplies. It was then that it struck him that he hadn't given any consideration to water. How was he going to drain that sink? And, what about drinking water and water to put in the sink? Hell, it was time for plan B and he hadn't even finished plan A.

Then Gary remembered something his friend Lee Roy had mentioned to him. Lee had a property over at Holiday Lake west of Des Moines. They only had a 2" drainage system with a pump in it. It was a special pump of some kind, Gary could remember that and he could always call Lee and get the particulars. Anyway if he could pump the stuff, he could put in a small septic tank and field just big enough to handle the shelter. And, he could put it in just below ground level. A water tank could go in to the west of the shelter in that small empty space between the shed and the back wall.

Just out of curiosity, Gary searched the net for sewage pumps and found that he had to look no further than Home Depot. "The SEL40 is a 0.4 HP sewage ejector pump that transfers residential sewage to nearby municipal hookups and is also applicable for home septic tanks. The pump can handle up to 2 in. solids and is manufactured with a replaceable, piggyback float switch for automatic operation. This pump can move up to 5800 GPH."

Better add a water purifier too. It only made sense to put in the sewage lines now before the walls went up and just made it harder. Should have thought of that before they poured the slab, but, they could run the lines the 1½' -2' to the outside of the slab and connect them up before the wall went in. Gary figured he could handle that without even calling up Ron. The beauty of this was he could go to a flush toilet instead of a composting toilet.

There was also a question of a hot water heater and Gary decided that they could get by with one of those miniature electric models. Somewhere in this whole process, he realized that the costs were getting away from him, but so long as Sharon kept saying

yes, he was going to keep on going. Gary talked to Chris about the used metal plate and Chris asked him what he wanted it for. Gary explained, but the look Chris gave him was one of those, "Are you out of your mind?" sort of looks. Nevertheless, Chris said he'd see about finding the plate, but it would be up to Gary to pay for it and the delivery to Palmdale. Gary sort of planned to cross that bridge when he came to it. Right now he had more irons in the fire than he could handle.

He rethought the generator and dug out enough soil to pour a separate slab outside the existing slab and poured his own using sackrete. That would increase the wall footage by 27 lineal feet, one more I beam and more steel plate. He'd also have to soundproof the room and the door between the shelter and generator room.

Gary talked to the firm that was going to erect the walls and pointed out that he needed some I-beams of proper size and properly spaced to support a ¾" steel plate and 6" of concrete. They told him sorry, but they only did concrete block work. Gary had to pay an engineer to tell him the size and spacing of the I-beams. He passed this information on to the block man and they left notches for the I-beams. That was it until after the first of the year. After that, he was going to have to part with some large money before he could put on the plates and pour the roof. He decided that the generator could wait. The January distribution would barely pay for the tank, kitchenette, I-beams and steel plate. That generator would have to wait until March or so. But, in the meantime he could tar the outside of the block wall, put in the pipes and fill the walls with mortar.

It turned out to be pretty troublesome to put in the pipes, then pull them out, put in mortar and reinsert the pipes. He did that before he tarred the outside so he could get a tar seal around the pipes. Ron came over and helped him set the tank in place above ground and run the pipe to the shelter. But something kept nagging at him. It was something he read in the installation manual for the generator he'd downloaded. Then he remembered; he had to have the gas company change out the gas meter to a higher capacity meter. When they finished filling the blocks with mortar, they installed the I-beams with a lot of help and with even more help laid the steel plates. With the plates in place, it occurred to Gary that if they welded a 6" vertical lip on the plates, he would have permanent forms to hold the concrete. He paid Chris welded on the lips for him.

By this time, they were well into March and there was money in the bank so Gary ordered up the 11+ yards of concrete for the roof. It was the same routine, except it only took one 12-yard truck this time. \$700 and a little work with a 2x4 was all it took to seal in the shelter. There was money enough for the septic system and the electrical transfer switch so Gary bought the switch and had it professionally installed. By the way, he got that rifle for Christmas. Sharon had been bargain shopping all year and had money for the rifle. Septic systems weren't legal within the city limits so Ron, Clarence and Gary put it in themselves. Once the septic system was in, Gary back filled the hole. That sewage pump ended up under the platform built for the toilet. It might need to be repaired some day and because the drain lines were an afterthought, the toilet had to be raised 6" above the floor. With help from Ron and the occasional piece of advice from Clarence, the shelter was done. All that remained to be completed was the stairway

cover and the steel door sealing off the shelter. Chris took care of those and even picked up the ¾" plate for Gary.

When the June distribution came, Gary bought the generator, made the modifications and got it installed. He even tried it out on the natural gas and it worked just fine. Otherwise, they would never have to worry about another blackout during the summer. From start to 'finish' the project had taken 11 months and close to \$15,000. But wait, he bought but hadn't installed a toilet or the water tank or the water heater yet. And, there was the question of food for the shelter. At least they had furniture and were saving the \$100 a month they paid for the storage locker. They could buy lots of food for the shelter with that \$100 a month. He was still waiting on Ron for news on a used propane tank, too.

The Three Amigos – Chapter 2 – Finishing Touches

“So, Ron tells me that this storm shelter of yours is really a fancy bomb shelter,” Clarence commented.

“Storm shelter, bomb shelter, what’s the difference?” Gary replied. “It will work if we ever get a tornado in the high desert and if some nut nukes LA, we’ll have a place to hide from the fallout.”

“You got any radiation detection equipment in that bomb shelter of yours Gary?” Clarence asked.

“Clarence, I don’t even have the toilet, water tank or a hot water heater installed yet,” Gary explained, “And all the food I have is 25# of beans and 25# of rice. But, we’re ahead \$100 a month on not paying for that storage locker so I’ll get the food in.”

“What about the other stuff Gar-Bear?” Ron asked.

“It’s just going to have to wait until I get the next trust distribution fellas,” Gary offered. “Together with the Geiger counter and some more ammo for my new rifle.”

“Let’s see that new rifle Gary,” Clarence requested.

Gary went to the bedroom closet and got the gun. He didn’t have a gun safe so he had to endure the trigger lock mandated by the state of California. He took the rifle to the kitchen, jacked the action open and handed the rifle to Clarence.

“Gee, a cowboy gun,” Clarence responded working the lever a couple of times.

“To tell you the truth Clarence, I’d rather have had a M1A Super Match, but it was a Christmas present from Sharon and I wasn’t sure I’d even get this rifle.”

“Oh? Why not?” Clarence asked.

“That storm shelter of mine turned into a financial nightmare,” Gary said. “I figured I get by less than 10 grand, but I’m at 15 grand and it isn’t done yet. And, before I do anything else, I have to rototill in some compost and plant grass. And before that I have to put in a new sprinkler system.”

“Make those slopes real gentle Gary,” Clarence suggested, “And it won’t be so hard to mow the grass once it comes in.”

“And that’s another thing,” Gary said. “My beautiful bride bought a lawn mower so she could mow the lawn and I’ve mowed the lawn every time since she bought it except the first time.”

"I didn't mean to bring up a sore subject Gary," Clarence apologized.

"That's ok Clarence," Gary smiled, "Things sort of have a way of evening out."

"Like your storm shelter," Ron chuckled.

"Exactly Ronald," Gary smiled. "She'd better not complain after all that quilting stuff she bought."

"I'll help you with the lawn Gar-Bear," Ron offered.

"Hey, you can count on me," Clarence said.

"Yes, you can hide out in my storm shelter when they start dropping the a-bombs," Gary laughed.

"What about the water tank Gar-Bear?" Ron asked.

"I found a company that sells a 2,400-gallon capacity water tank that's 90"x150"x50" Gary replied. "The price is \$1,670 and I figured that I'd put 2 in side by side. 4,800 gallons of water isn't much water when you have a lot of people in a shelter, you know. Figure it out pal. Say you have 20 people using a toilet twice a day," Gary explained.

"That's 32 gallons of water with one of these stools compared to 60 gallons a day for a regular stool. By the time you figure in all the water usage those 400 gallons of water you save in 2 weeks add up. And what if the usage is 4 times per person per day? That's almost 800-gallons. So yeah, it makes a difference. Anyway, I can do the 2 water tanks, in one fell swoop. We can install the shower, stool and sink I bought and hook up the kitchenette."

"I kind of like this rifle," Clarence said handing it back, "I might get me one just like it."

"Hell Clarence may she'll give us an extra discount if we buy two," Ron suggested. "I sort of like the looks of the lever action rifle myself."

"Buy a lot of ammo Ron," Gary suggested. "And don't let that clerk in that store screw you around either. The .45 Colt and .45 Long Colt is the same round. It's the .45 short Colt that's different."

"Still mad cause he didn't know the difference?" Ron asked.

"Well you'd think that a guy who worked in a gun store where they sold ammunition would know something as basic as that, even if I didn't," Gary replied. "The next guns I'm buying are a set of three of Ruger case colored Vaquero's, one in each barrel length. And I'm gonna get me one of them Kirkpatrick double holster Laredoan with a straight holster and a cross draw holster. I'll get a separate holster for the 7½", a Paladin rig."

“Better get it with suspenders,” Ron laughed.

“You trying to say my butt ain’t fat enough to hold up the weight?” Gary snapped.

“Ron, I wouldn’t touch that with a 10’ pole if I were you,” Clarence advised.

“I didn’t say you didn’t have a fat butt Gar-Bear,” Ron said.

“Are you trying to say I do have a fat butt?” Gary pursued.

“Ron I told you to let it be,” Clarence laughed.

“Gary I don’t have any opinion about your butt, it’s your head that’s fat,” Ron continued.

“That’s better,” Gary said. “You were starting to po me for a minute.”

“How about them Cubs?” Clarence said.

“I didn’t know you were a Cub’s fan Clarence,” Gary said.

“I’m not Gary,” Clarence admitted. “So when are you putting in the finishing touches to your storm shelter.”

“September,” Gary replied, “What about the Cub’s? They ain’t half bad for a team that can’t win for losing.”

“September, huh?” Ron said. “You gonna dig the hole for those tanks yourself?”

“What tanks?” Gary asked.

“Those M1A2SEP water tanks,” Ron replied.

“They aren’t M1A2SEP water tanks Ron they’re model number TN2400WT,” Gary replied. “An M1A2SEP is an Abr... Say, are you trying to make a fool out of me?”

“Me? Nope, you’re doing a pretty good job all by yourself,” Ron replied. “I don’t know about you Clarence, but I’ve got to get a move on. Call me when you’re ready to do the yard, Gar-Bear.”

“I got to go too, Gary,” Clarence said rising.

Gary had been running a portable sprinkler on the bare dirt each day helping it to settle and compact a little. And his neighbor, Jose, was a gardener by trade and had the skills and equipment to handle the task of mixing in the compost, installing the sprinklers and seeding the lawn. Gary had also been watering the area behind the shed, softening the

dirt. He started to haul dirt once again. Had the area behind the shed been a foot smaller in either direction, he would have been in trouble, too. He only dug down about 5'. This would leave the top of the tanks about 10" below ground, but once he covered them with the dirt he'd excavated, they'd be okay. And like the friends they were, Clarence and Ron had helped out. Besides, he got tired and it got hard to dig any deeper.

There were all those details, too. Like shelving to hold the food and such. Gar-Bear emptied the shelves in the garage, dismantled them and lugged them to the shelter where he reassembled them and attached them to the walls as insurance against an earthquake. And of course there was the matter of running a water line to the hole so that once the tanks were in, they could be filled and topped off from the city water supply. That looked like it was going to be a problem until Gary realized that he could cut into the supply line for the sprinkler control valves and would only have to run about 100' of water line. His two pals kept showing up and helping out, almost as if they had a work detector installed and knew when he was going to take on another difficult task. Ron and Clarence even spread the bags of compost and rototilled them in without being asked.

When the next big trust distribution came, Gary had ordered the water tanks. With Chris and Matt to help the 5 of them manhandled the tanks into place. And connected the water lines. Gary even added an electrically controlled valve to cut the water supply to the tanks in an emergency. Then they hauled the dirt back, covered over the two tanks and spread a little more compost. Jose installed the sprinkler system and Gary seeded the lawn. Except for the fact that the west half of the back yard was now elevated about four feet between the shed and the tree and a little higher behind the shed, the yard didn't look all that unusual. Yeah right.

Gary hired Jose to maintain the lawn; he was just too tired to keep it up. And, every month, Sharon and he went to Sam's Club and Costco and added a little more food to the shelter. And when next the trust fund made a distribution, Gary went to see Sandy and bought those 3 Vaqueros and ordered the rig from Kirkpatrick Leather and Alfonso's. He also added 1,000-rounds of full power .45 Colt Buffalo Bore ammo to the shelter.

This might be a good point to give you a tour of the shelter. The 3x4x1 $\frac{3}{4}$ " trap door to the stairwell was hinged a foot in from the back edge. It was counter balanced to a degree and further aided by some garage door springs. It was opened and closed by a Stanley door opener that activated some sort of arrangement Chris had figured out on his own. The stairs were wood with a 9" rise, making them rather steep. Underneath the stairs were the sewage pump and some non-essential supplies that could be accessed by swinging the stairs up on their hinge, which was about halfway down the stairs. At the bottom was a flush door to the left. The door swung outward and was normally left open. Chris had been most generous with the hinges, using so many, in fact, that it almost looked like a piano hinge.

The interior of the stairwell was painted with a light grey concrete sealer, applied by

hand. The interior of the shelter was likewise painted with the sealer and a coat of off-white paint topped that. Just after you enter the shelter, you encounter the kitchenette; and beyond that were shelving filling the remainder of the south wall. The generator room contained the generator and shelving for extra supplies. The main room was sparsely furnished. It had a 30"x60" table where Gary intended to put in some Ham gear and a computer. There were 3 sets of bunk beds on either side of the door leading to the generator room 2 pair on one side and a single pair on the other. There was also a sofa and folding chairs. A 19" TV sat on a stand next to Gary's desk, facing the room. And, above the TV was a rifle rack.

The only table was an 8' folding table that could be taken down and stored to make room for the cots. The shelter was quite Spartan, containing only the essentials for survival. Gary didn't have transceivers yet, only a receiver. Adelpia had graciously run a cable TV feed to the shelter, for a fee of course. The installer hadn't been allowed into the shelter proper, he had terminated the cable connection in the stairwell and Gary had taken care of the rest. Lighting inside the shelter consisted of 2 48" florescent fixtures in the generator room and four of the fixtures in the main room with the bulbs in each on separate circuits, allowing them daylight and evening settings. The shelter, though not plush, was well thought out. A box with a pair of switches allowed them to remotely shut off the water feed to the tanks and the natural gas feed as shown in the generator installation manual.

For the fun of it, Gary, Ron and Clarence and Sharon, Linda and Lucy spent a weekend in the shelter once it was finished. They locked it down and simulated a real emergency. The first day hadn't been bad, the women gathered into a group at one end of the table and the men did likewise at the other end. The little refrigerator was well stocked with steaks and the like and they got through the weekend without a major fight breaking out. With water being a precious commodity in an emergency situation, rather than installing a regular showerhead, they put in one of those hand held showerheads people usually attached to a bathtub faucet. Navy showers were the order of the day. Gary also added deodorant to the supplies he had stored.

A second and far more important discovery was made. They ended up leaving the door open and the ground lid cracked about half way because they ran out of air. There is a solution to every problem and Gary ordered an air filtration system from that company up in Oregon called a Safe Cell. The Safe Cell came in 60CFM and 120CFM models and the prices were \$4,125 and \$6,600 and replacement filter sets were \$690 and \$1,390 respectively. The generator pulled its air from the shelter and exhausted its gases through a pipe with a blast valve. Gary spent the \$6,600 so the generator wouldn't get radioactive, a change in plans.

Three months later, they ran a second drill and this time, it worked out fine. The real test, however, would be if they had a real emergency and had to spend 2 weeks rather than 2 days in the shelter. Then, it wouldn't be steaks every night and a party-like atmosphere. It would be survival rations and a lot of tense days. Ronald picked up a couple of dozen 1,000-piece puzzles and told Gary to find space for them in the shelter.

Gary went looking for some used Ham gear and antennas he could install. Clarence and Ron bought themselves each a Ruger Vaquero in .45 Colt and a Mexican gun belt. Clarence also expanded his wardrobe to include a cowboy hat, boots and jeans. [Note: There are the original Ruger Vaquero and the 'New Vaquero'. All references are to the original model.]

Having the shelter in Gary's back yard did two things. It brought the 3 men closer together for one thing, and it gave them a certain measure of reassurance that in a TSHTF scenario, they at least had a chance. When occasionally the three of them showed up at a meeting, they took a terrible razzing over the western attire, especially Clarence. But, they just smiled and let it pass. And after every meeting, they stopped by Sandy's store, which was less than a block away and ogled the guns. Gary added a Winchester 9422 to his gun collection and a Mossberg 590A1 12-gauge shotgun. Ron and Clarence soon followed suit, they liked the lever action rifles and everyone needed a shotgun. They also stocked up on 12-gauge ammo including an assortment of the 3" 15-pellet 00 buckshot and some 3" Brenneke 1 $\frac{3}{8}$ oz Black Magic slugs. They bought bricks of .22LR ammo when it was on sale.

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It appeared that President Kerry didn't really know what he wanted to do once he had taken office. In a narrow, but uncontested election, he and Edwards had booted Bush and Cheney from the White House. And although the American voters had seen fit to remove Bush, they elected a lot of Republicans to the House and Senate. There was near instant animosity between the Executive and Congressional branches of the government, and most of the legislation that Kerry introduced was killed in Committee in either the House or the Senate. Kerry couldn't even get the Assault Weapons Ban re-adopted. Out in California, Arnold had showed his true colors and the man in Sacramento was clearly a RINO. Kerry had started a pullout of the US troops in Afghanistan, declaring the War on Terror to be won. The problem was that the dang fool actually believed that crap.

Maybe it was the drawdown of US troops that made Gary nervous, or maybe it was just the news on TV and in the papers. The Three Amigos decided to do a real drill with the shelter now that all of the mechanical problems had been solved. Over a 3-day weekend, they started a day early and spend 4 days locked down in the shelter, feeding the generator with natural gas and experiencing what it might really be like for an extended period. It was then that they added the VCR and a large collection of films to the equipment in the shelter. Although the women seemed content to work on the jigsaw puzzles, the men tired of conversation and called a halt to the test, retrieved Gary's VCR and 500 movies and resumed the test. If there were faults in this concept, this was the time to find them and the solutions. When it came to a real survival situation, they couldn't open the doors and go looking for any darned movies to watch.

They also added an air filtration system to keep down the odors as a result of the 4-day test. The generator required 777cfm of air to keep the engine cool. Running it for 96

hours non-stop revealed another chink in their armor, heat buildup. It was quite a feat of engineering, but Chris, who had experience building racecars figured it out. He routed a cowl to the air exhaust and exhausted the heated air to the outside air. The direct-drive, centrifugal blower forced the heated air out the inlet pipe, back to the outside. Problem solved.

No matter what you do to prepare, you'll never be 100% ready. In the end, you will discover something you overlooked and wished you had. The real beauty of all of those dry runs was that they had identified mechanical and people problems and had done their very best to solve them before they ever had to be put to the real test. Chris and Matt had been a big help getting the shelter ready. So, Gary put some folding cots under the bunk beds just in case a real emergency ever arose. The men and their wives also stocked up on first aid supplies and prescription medicines that they rotated in and out of the shelter. Gary found his used Ham equipment and put up antennas. Amy's old lap top computer also made an appearance as well as a large collection of CD's containing everything from the Encyclopedia Britannica to topographical maps of the states of California and Arizona. Gary even added a 25-watt transceiver that was capable of operating on the same frequencies as Chris's racing radios.

Kerry's withdrawal of the American forces from Afghanistan had caused less trouble than anticipated. However, certain actions by the Bush administration had some long reaching effects that were beginning in the fall of 2005 to be felt around the world. "Hasta la vista, baby?" Always be careful what you ask for, you just may get it!

One of the many headaches that the US has had was the Puerto Rican Island of Vieques. In the waning years of the Clinton administration, protesters demanded that the US Navy abandon bombing and naval gunfire exercises that had taken place on the largely uninhabited island for nearly seventy years.

Liberal icons bumped into one another to fly to Puerto Rico, boat over to the island, trespass (but never on a day that there was an exercise scheduled) and get arrested for the benefit of the New York Times or Newsweek. They included the Reverend Al Sharpton, Mrs. Jesse Jackson, Joan Baez, Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., Edward James Olmos, Michael Moore and Ramsey Clark, just to name a few.

In 2002, the bombing exercises were transferred to an Air Force bombing range in central Florida, not far from the Jacksonville and Pensacola Naval Air Stations. In January, many of the protesters were back in Puerto Rico, celebrating the final bombing exercise on Vieques and waved Puerto Rican flags and placards that read "US Navy, get out of Puerto Rico."

The following Feb, SecDef announced that the US Navy will close the Roosevelt Roads Naval Air Station in Puerto Rico in 2004, eliminating 1200 civilian jobs as well as 700 military positions. This naval facility is estimated to put nearly \$300 million annually into the local economy.

The next day a stunned Governor Sila Calderon, held a news conference in San Juan, protesting the base closure as a serious blow to Commonwealth's fragile economy. The governor stated that "The people of Puerto Rico don't now or never did have an interest in closing the Vieques bombing range or the Roosevelt Roads naval base. We are interested in both staying in Puerto Rico."

When asked, the Commander-in Chief, Western Atlantic Command, said, "Without Vieques, I see no further need for the facility at Roosevelt Roads. None." So, Yanqui go home? Fine. But we'll take our dollars with us. Hasta la vista, baby!

On February 21, 2004 the SecDef also announced that starting this year, the US European Command would begin moving most, if not all, of its active combat and support units from bases in Germany to others being established in Poland, The Czech Republic, Hungary and Turkey to "better position them for rapid deployment to likely hot spots in those parts of the world".

Immediately the business and government leaders in the German states of Hesse, Rhineland and Wurttemberg, protested the loss of nearly \$6 billion in revenue each year from the bases and manpower to be displaced. A spokesman for the Foreign Ministry speculated that the move may be "what the Americans call 'payback' for the actions of this government in opposing military action in Iraq." Does anyone know the German translation for "Hasta la vista, baby?"

Oh, ain't it nice to see a government with guts and a good memory? What fun! GOD BLESS AMERICA! [It came in an email and had to make it into the story. Thank you Jim.]

And if that weren't enough, no sooner had the last American left Afghanistan than the Taliban made a reemergence, overwhelming the shaky Afghani government. Add to that the drawdown of 70,000 Americans stationed around the world, a move also initiated by the Bush administration and one soon realized that half the world was angry for one reason or another with the US of A. And the French, as usual, were still criticizing the US for going into Iran and Afghanistan in the first place. And, what was happening in Iraq? Well, the President, in his infinite wisdom, was drawing down the troops there, too. He'd stopped sending replacements and when a soldier's year was up, he or she was brought stateside. This resulted in an increase in American loss of life. Finally, perhaps in desperation, he ordered all American forces to withdraw to American facilities in the neighboring semi-friendly Arab states for transport back to the US.

The growing unrest made the 3 men very, very uneasy. Maybe that explains why they forced the money out of their budgets and each bought a M1A Super Match rifle with a Springfield Armory 6-20x50mm Pro-Plex BDC Government Model scope and Harris bipod. Derek acquired magazines for them and Sandy was able to provide six cases of the .308 NATO surplus ammo. She also got them 3,000 rounds of Black Hills 175gr BTHP Match ammo divided equally among the three. And, for a large consideration, she got in touch with a class III dealer and purchased 3 Surefire FA762S with the fast attach

mounts. Sandy wasn't above doing a favor for a friend and she installed the mounts and the suppressors for the 3 men.

In office for less than a year, John Kerry was almost wishing he hadn't run for President. Almost. Bush had taken his defeat gracefully and retired to Texas to work on his library. He was very silent and it seemed as if he fell off the face of the planet. Cheney had gone back to Halliburton, raising questions as to whether he'd ever really left. The United States of America was the fastest growing country in the Western Hemisphere, partly due to European immigrants, but mainly due to the unending flow of Méxicans across the border. The economy was in the toilet.

Gary emptied out the shed that set next to the shelter and carefully organized the less critical emergency supplies. These were the less critical items that they would need in a TSHTF situation like extra toilet paper. When he ran out of storage space in the shelter for food, he put the remaining food in the shed, too. Most everyone in Palmdale had a shed in the backyard, so there was nothing about the shed that made it stand out from the other thousands of sheds. And, with the purchase of those suppressors, our 3 boys had crossed the line. They were honest law abiding citizens in every way but one. But for some reason the US seemed to think that a suppressor was an evil instrument used only by criminals and inappropriate in the hands of the ordinary civilian. But then the US had a long history of trying to legislate morality for its citizens.

And, the 2nd Amendment? The courts and the liberals said it didn't mean what it said in plain language. It was that language about the well-regulated militia that threw them, but the truth was that they just plain feared or hated firearms; or perhaps both. They were confusing the availability of firearms with the mindset of those that would use firearms wrongly, regardless of the availability. Where did those gangs in LA get the full auto AK-47's? Surely not from their friendly gun store down the street.

Knowledge is power. As a police officer I strive to acquire as much knowledge as possible regarding the potential threats I may have to face. Obviously the threat posed by an armed criminal is high on my list of concerns. In researching that potential threat I've learned that the public perception and media portrayal of the matter is far from realistic. The subject of so called *Cop-killer* bullets is a prime example.

The inflammatory headlines aren't hard to find; *Deadly Teflon Bullets Blast Through Police Vests*; *NRA Opposes Cop Killer Bullet Ban*, etc. Likewise, the misleading scenes in television crime dramas and in movies are numerous. A memorable scene in one of the *Lethal Weapon* movies had Mel Gibson's character firing *Cop-killer* bullets through the blade of a bulldozer! The real story is significantly less dramatic.

In the mid 1960's, Dr. Paul Kopsch (an Ohio coroner), Daniel Turcos (a police sergeant) and Donald Ward (Dr. Kopsch's special investigator) began experimenting with special purpose handgun ammunition. Their objective was to develop a law enforcement round capable of improved penetration against hard targets like windshield glass and automobile doors. Conventional bullets, made primarily from lead, are often ineffective against

hard targets especially when fired at handgun velocities. In the 1970's, Kopsch, Turcos and Ward produced their *KTW* handgun ammunition using steel core bullets capable of great penetration. Following further experimentation, in 1981 they began producing bullets constructed primarily of brass. The hard brass bullets caused exceptional wear on handgun barrels, a problem combated by coating the bullets with Teflon. The Teflon coating did nothing to improve penetration; it simply reduced damage to the gun barrel.

Despite the facts that *KTW* ammunition had never been available to the general public and that no police officer has ever been killed by a handgun bullet penetrating their body armor, the media incorrectly reported that the Teflon coated bullets were designed to defeat the body armor that law enforcement officers were beginning to use. The myth of *Cop-killer* bullets was born.

In January of 1982, NBC Television broadcast a sensationalist prime time special titled *Cop Killer Bullets*. Law enforcement officials had asked NBC not to air the program as the use of body armor by police officers was still not common knowledge and the *KTW* ammunition was virtually unheard of outside law enforcement circles. The safety of law enforcement officers took a back seat to ratings at NBC however and they not only broadcast the show, but re-broadcast it again six months later.

Following significant media hype and widespread misconceptions, Congress got into the act and proposed legislation that would have outlawed any bullet based on its ability to penetrate certain bullet resistant material. The FBI, Bureau of Alcohol Tobacco and Firearms, and other forensic experts cautioned that the proposed ban was too vague to be enforceable. The NRA opposed the proposed law since it would have banned not only the controversial armor piercing handgun rounds, but nearly all conventional rifle ammunition as well. (Most rifle ammunition will easily penetrate the most commonly worn protective vests.)

The NRA proposed alternative legislation based upon the actual design and construction of the bullets. The final, approved version of the bill (H.R. 3121 passed in 1986) prohibited the sale of armor piercing ammunition [which may be used in a handgun] other than to law enforcement and the military. Representative Mario Biaggi (D-N.Y.) the original bill's sponsor, stated that the final legislation "... was not some watered down version of what we set out to do. In the end there was no compromise on the part of police safety..."

Gun control advocates and the news media jumped on the NRA's opposition to the original, vague and ineffective proposal. They ignored the NRA's contribution to the final legislation insisting to this day that the NRA wants *Cop Killer* bullets to be available to the public.

Here are the facts:

- "Armor piercing" ammunition is only legally available to law enforcement agencies and to the armed forces.

- Rather than opposing the ban on “armor piercing” ammunition, the NRA was in fact instrumental in crafting the law that Congress ultimately passed.
- When properly wearing the appropriate body armor, not one law enforcement officer has ever been killed by a handgun bullet penetrating their vest. The National Institute of Justice (NIJ) certifies three levels of body armor. The most commonly worn, Level IIA, offers realistic protection against all .22, .25, .32, .380, and .38, caliber handgun ammunition, against most 9mm, .357 Magnum, .40 S&W, .45 ACP and .44 Magnum handgun ammunition and against 000 buck shotgun pellets. Level II and Level IIIA armor protects from even greater threats including 12 gauge shotgun slugs and the “hottest” .44 Magnum rounds.

Cop-killer bullets are a myth born from media hype and nurtured by unrealistic Hollywood portrayals and the deliberately misleading claims of the anti-gun lobby. An objective, rational look at the facts quickly separates the myth from the reality. Knowledge is power.

The above article is by Mike Casey (a pseudonym) who is currently a Patrol Officer, Firearms Instructor and Field Training Officer in a municipal police department in Maine. He previously served as a Deputy Sheriff in the Detroit area and as a US Army Armored Cavalry officer. Mike has served in a variety of law enforcement positions including horse-mounted patrol, bicycle patrol and as a Special Response Team member. He holds a BA in Criminology.

The Three Amigos – Chapter 3 – The Real Test

The trial runs had allowed them to debug the shelter and get used to being together in cramped quarters. The men had no idea how important that would become in the days ahead. And, one might think that 4,800-gallons of water was a lot and it would have been had things worked out differently. Remember that Gary and Sharon had Amy and her 2 kids still living with them (+2 cots) and Lorrie, David and the 5 kids weren't but 4 miles away. On top of that there were John and Kevin to consider, and of course Clarence's sister. The combined Olsen family numbered 12, the Green's 4 and the Rawlings' 3. Add to that Chris and Patti and their 2 kids. The potential population of the shelter was 23. It all depended upon who made it before they closed those doors. Chris's solution to the cooling of the motor had a major strength/shortcoming. The shelter was quiet, but you couldn't hear anyone knocking on the outer hatch.

The trial runs had also shown that were a real emergency to arise, they needed to clean out the fresh produce from their refrigerators and grab whatever potatoes and onions they had on hand. The latest addition to the shelter had been a small freezer, a 12.8 Cu. Ft. Frigidaire Chest Freezer that the manufacturer claimed held 448 pounds of food. It had been reasonably priced at \$237 at Lowe's. Gary and Sharon had started using the freezer for most of their meat and had even stocked up a little at Costco on some of the 12% ground beef and some roasts. The freezer was not full by any means, but there was enough for a crowd for a couple of weeks.

Ron had 'found' a used 5,500 gallon propane tank and had it delivered. It needed a new safety valve and pressure tested but he assured Gar-Bear it was sound.

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During the waning days of 2005, most of the troops were either home or on the way. The Threat Level seemed to be a rubber ball, bouncing between yellow and orange. However, there seemed to be no cause for alarm, the military was apparently on DEF-CON 5, normal, and it was difficult to figure out what information the government had that kept causing them to raise the threat level. They weren't even explaining the changes beyond saying they had a reasonable certainty that the US was facing a terrorist attack. That all changed on November 11th, 2005. The Threat Level was raised to red and an announcement made that the FBI had 'reliable information' that one or more terrorist cells were planning on detonating either dirty bombs or small nuclear devices in several major cities.

5. Severe Condition (Red). A Severe Condition reflects a severe risk of terrorist attacks. Under most circumstances, the Protective Measures for a Severe Condition are not intended to be sustained for substantial periods of time. In addition to the Protective Measures in the previous Threat Conditions, Federal departments and agencies also should consider the following general measures in addition to the agency-specific Protective Measures that they will develop and implement:

- Increasing or redirecting personnel to address critical emergency needs;
- Assigning emergency response personnel and pre-positioning and mobilizing specially trained teams or resources;
- Monitoring, redirecting, or constraining transportation systems; and
- Closing public and government facilities.

Gary guessed that explained why all flights were grounded and Amtrak and the bus lines weren't running. He also guessed that it accounted for what amounted to a news blackout. The government was trying to prevent panic by not being more specific on the threat. But, this sounded serious so he suggested to Sharon that she pick up an extra 20# bag of spuds and some milk at the store. He also checked over the supplies in the shelter before she left and decided that they didn't really need anything else. Sharon called Lorrie and told her to keep an eye on the news. When Amy got home from school Gary suggested that she stay close by and keep her cell phone on if she left for any reason. The 'new' propane tank had a new safety valve and passed the pressure test. It now contained 3 500-gallon deliveries of propane out of the 10 planned deliveries.

"Ronald, what do you make of this Red Threat Level?" Gary asked over the phone.

"Hell, partner, I have no idea, but it doesn't sound good," Ron replied. "I sent Linda to the store to pick up a few things in case we end up in that bunker of yours."

"Yeah, Sharon's there now picking up potatoes and milk," Gary responded.

"That's what Lyn is getting plus some fresh veggies," Ron related.

"We may have to move that spare refrigerator of mine to the shelter with all the milk and produce we're going to have," Gary raised an alarm.

"I'll get Clarence and we'll be right over partner," Ron suggested, "I have a bad feeling that we are going to need the refrigerator pretty soon."

Twenty minutes later Ron and Clarence appeared. They used Gary's 2-wheeler and moved the refrigerator to the entrance of the stairwell. After setting the 2-wheeler at the bottom of the stairs, they grunted and groaned the refrigerator down the stairs and wheeled it to the main room. They then carried the food that had been in the refrigerator and all of the soda Gary had stocked in the garage to the shelter. Gary thanked his friends and they returned home, probably to watch the news. Gary went back to the living room and dropped into his recliner to listen to CNN. They were carrying breaking news of an arrest of 4 individuals believed to be in the possession of one of those dirty bombs. A Nuclear Emergency Support Team (NEST) was in route to the site.

If necessary, NEST can deploy approximately 600 individuals to the scene of a terrorist threat, although actual deployments have rarely involved more than 45 people. According to a Nevada Operations Office briefing, deployed personnel come from a pool of

about 750 individuals, most of who work for Energy or its private contractors in other primary capacities. In addition to NEST members based at the team's Las Vegas headquarters, personnel are pulled from three Energy Department labs (Lawrence Livermore, Los Alamos, and Sandia), and from three contractors (Reynolds Electrical & Engineering, Raytheon Services of Nevada, and EG&G).

NEST personnel also have a wide variety of specialties. NEST briefing slides list 17 different categories of personnel, including four types of physicists (nuclear, infrared, atmospheric, and health), engineers, chemists, and mathematicians, as well as specialists in communications, logistics, management, and public information. As a result, the organization chart for a full NEST field deployment contains a multitude of divisions and subdivisions – what one might expect at a large government agency.

Gary was just reaching for the phone to call Ron when Sharon came in. She wanted help unloading the car and needed to give someone a piece of her mind. Albertson's had been an absolute mad house, she said, and she was lucky to get what little she had. Gary took the milk and potatoes to the shelter. When he got back, Ron was on the phone.

"I don't like the looks of this one darned bit Gar-Bear," Ron said, "That NEST Team being sent to the site suggests to me that all hell is going to break loose."

"I wouldn't jump to conclusions just yet Ron, but if you'd feel better, why don't you all come over here. I can stand to watch FOX News for one night," Gary replied.

"You seem pretty laid back in light of what's happening," Ron retorted.

"I'm only 100' from the shelter entrance, I can afford to be a little laid back," Gary explained.

"I'm bringing all of our stuff for the shelter, just in case," Ron announced.

"That might not be a bad idea partner," Gary agreed.

"See you in a bit," Ron said and hung up.

The phone was barely back in the cradle before it rang again. This time it was Clarence with essentially the same concerns Ron had expressed. Gary suggested that Clarence get his stuff, Lucy and his sister and come over. Ron and Linda were on the way and they'd just make a party out of it. Sharon got on the phone to Lorrie and suggested in the strongest terms that they get some clothes around and come to the house. The Three Amigos were, without realizing it, circling the wagons. And Patti was at the door, having just returned from her usual shopping at Costco and Sam's Club. She and Sharon were visiting about whether Patti should unload her car at her house or put the food in the shelter. Sharon suggested that Patti just keep out what she needed for the night and put the rest of her food in the shelter. Gary decided that if Sharon were that con-

cerned, he'd better move the food they kept in the garage to the shelter too. It was mainly coffee and his cigarettes, but you never could tell. He kept out a pack of smokes and moved all of the other things to the shelter. He also moved his guns to the shelter, just in case.

Ronald showed up hauling his entire gun collection several cases of ammo, a suitcase with changes of clothing, their prescriptions and the things Linda had gotten at Stater Brothers. Everything went into the shelter. They barely had time to put Ron's stuff away when Clarence showed up. As you might have guessed, Lucy had been to the market, too. The stairway into the shelter was becoming a regular thoroughfare between Sharon and Patti and Gary and the Amigos. When everything was in the shelter, Sharon got Gary to slice the ham she'd prepared for dinner and everyone made do with ham sandwiches and deli potato salad (8 pound box). Lorrie and David showed up with the kids and the three old geezers retreated to the shelter so they could hear the TV. David joined them with his dinner and they turned on FOX News.

The NEST Team was still in route, but the fire department and police department bomb squad in Denver had checked the device over and the readings they got on their Geiger counters essentially confirmed that the device was radioactive. On the advice of the NEST Team they were not to touch the bomb. There was no timer counting down or any indication that the device had been armed and the feds wanted to see the weapon in its pristine state.

As it happened, at that very moment, there were probably more terrorists in the US than in the Middle East. The Muslims had been slowly moving people into the country one or two at a time for a couple of years. These people were essentially no-name suicide bombers. They'd plant whatever weapon was assigned to them and set the timer, if permitted, but would otherwise blow it up in place if they were caught. The Denver arrest had been a fluke event but the terrorists had a contingency plan in case any of their cells were discovered. They were to drop everything and plant their weapons, timed to detonate exactly 24-hours after the arrest. It was very thoughtful of CNN and FOX news to announce that, "At 4:34pm local..."

Given the nature of the weapon in the terrorists' possession, DHS chose to treat the 4 Muslims as enemy combatants and any civil liberties they had vanished in an instant. A team of specialists (thugs) was assigned to question the men and they ended up spilling their guts, literally and figuratively. But the men knew only that more than one cell was to plant weapons and not the identities of any of the other teams. The men also knew and revealed that in 24-hours all of the remaining weapons would be detonated. How would you like to be the Secretary for Homeland Security or the President knowing that one or more nuclear devices were set to explode at 4:35pm MST on 12Nov05? And, what would you do? Warn the American people? A city the size of New York or Los Angeles could not possibly be evacuated in 24 hours, let alone the time they had remaining, less than 10 hours.

There are some situations for which there isn't a right answer and anything one chooses

to do is going to be viewed in hindsight as the wrong choice. The closest thing to right that anyone could come up with was to warn the American people but tell them to take cover and hunker down. Assuming that he could send people somewhere in the time allotted, what was to say that he wouldn't be sending them from a place of relative safety to a place of danger. And the US hadn't had a Civil Defense program for 25 or more years.

The instructions the President gave the public were to go to a place of safety, e.g., the subway or a community building and take cover. Teams would search for the bombs up to the last moment, but to evacuate was practically a guarantee that they were exposing themselves to being killed. A lot of people took the President's advice, but just as many thought they could beat the traffic. Consequently, the freeways and thruways and most highways became congested and eventually ground to a halt. Law enforcement agencies did their best, exposing themselves to incalculable risk trying to get people to places of shelter. But in the end, it was all for naught. Millions were caught in the open when at 3:34pm PST. 6:34pm EST, the bombs exploded.

The terrorists had a mixture of man portable nuclear devices, the so-called suitcase bombs and the dirty bombs containing a high explosive charge and radioactive material. Major cities were exposed to both hazards. In New York City, for example, a suitcase nuke went off in the financial district and the dirty bombs went off in the five boroughs. In Los Angeles, the dirty bombs were placed near the coast to take advantage of the prevailing winds and the nukes went off in the downtown area and Van Nuys. The nuclear devices had all been placed in the financial districts of the major cities and thirty of the devices were exploded. The dirty bombs were all placed to allow the wind to blow the contamination across populated areas and were, for the most part, placed in the western parts of the cities. The initial count of exploded ordinance was some 150 dirty bombs and 30 of the small man-portable nukes.

The announcement came approximately 8½ hours before the devices exploded. NEST Teams located and disarmed only 20 of the dirty bombs and 4 of the man-portable nukes. The 7am PST, 10am EST announcement was recorded and a tape loop set up by most broadcasters to continuously broadcast the announcement. Everyone had done something, right or wrong, to avoid the explosions but a lot of people simply didn't make it. The men had watched TV well past midnight and had gotten up early to follow developments. When they caught the broadcast, the 23 people were assembled and Gary and Sharon's home and an hour early the people and their pets headed for the shelter. Since Palmdale didn't seem to be a likely target, they actually didn't button up the shelter until around 3:30pm. FOX was broadcasting a live inset picture of New York and CNN had a split screen playing the announcement on one side a showing a live feed from Washington on the other.

At 3:34 PST, give or take a minute, a flash was seen in the street cameras and moments later the complete feeds were lost. There was a little quiet sobbing, a lot of head shaking and even a little cursing in that little shelter in Palmdale. Just moments before they buttoned up, Dick showed up and was admitted to the shelter. There were 24 peo-

ple, 5 dogs and cats in the shelter. The dogs went into the generator room and the cats stayed in the main room. And yes, they'd brought a couple of litter pans for the cats, some piddle pads for the dogs and food for both. There were a few anxious moments until the dogs either came to accept each other or somehow realized the gravity of the situation, probably the former. ($600 \div 24 = 25 \text{ft}^2/\text{person}$)

They turned on an AM radio and a FM radio to get the news because no TV channels were broadcasting. The first stations that came back on the air were KTPI-AM and KTPI-FM. It wasn't long before the generator kicked in signaling the interruption of electricity. Gary flipped the switch cutting off the water feed to the tank. A short time later, the generator cut out and the battery powered emergency lights came on. Gary manually switched the fuel feed valve to propane and restarted the generator. He then hit the switch that cut off the natural gas at its source. They were now on full emergency status. Gary checked the output meter on the generator and it was putting out a minimum load. On propane at 25% load, the generator burned 1.2 gallons per hour, giving them 1,250 hours at minimum load. They planned to cut the generator each night at 9pm and restart it each morning at 6am, extending the propane, if necessary.

This was possible because of a large bank of deep-cycle batteries, a charger and an inverter that provided enough power for the ventilating system, the refrigerators and the freezer. The next morning's breakfast preparation consumed 75% power for a period of 1 hour. Gary then calculated that the propane consumption would be $1 \times 2 \text{ gal} + 12 \times 1.2 \text{ gal}$ or 16.4 gallons per day. At that rate of consumption, they had enough propane for about 91½ days. The battery bank, charger and inverter had been a late addition that came about when Gary calculated the propane consumption at 25% power and discovered that at 25% or 1.2gph, they only had enough propane a short time. The 2 additional propane deliveries were now factored into the new calculation. They need to stay in the shelter for 343 hours and Gary figured that without the batteries, they'd never make it. He'd obviously been right based on the load during meal preparation.

Fortunately, there were only 3 small children not counting Daniel, who was 22 years old, 6'2" tall, weighed 230 pounds and had the mind of a 3-year-old. A stack of Disney movies and cartoons kept the children under some level of control. However, by the end of the 24 hours, it was evident that this would be a long 2 weeks. Those 600 square feet were crowded and that was an understatement. On the other hand, there were 336 count boxes of candy bars, sodas, ice cream cups and bars in the freezer and an assortment of games for each age group. And, it wasn't as if they really had much choice in the matter. They'd have to switch to powdered milk before it was all over, but if that were the worst that happened, they'd get through. I forgot they had one other guest, some guy named Murphy. Murphy had been expected and they were as prepared for his presence as humanly possible.

According to the hourly newscasts on KTPI, The final count on dirty bombs was 152 and 30 suitcase nukes. So far, the background radiation level in Palmdale was rising, but was still within the tolerable range. Reports out of LA were very sketchy, and no official

reports had been issued by the government to that point. The terrorists, it was speculated, had hit major population centers only. Gary connected the antenna leads and started listening to the ham bands for any news.

“Frankly guys,” Gary said, “I hadn’t figured that we’d lose the natural gas so fast. But when I was rereading the owner’s manual on the generator I realized that I’d under purchased the propane. So, I figured out this battery setup and had it installed. I’m sure glad now that I spent that money.”

“I’m sure glad that we have the shower and the air purification system,” Ron observed. “These 24 people and all of these pets would have made this place uninhabitable in short order.”

“I agree with that Ron,” Gary said, “Those test runs were a smart step. I’d really hoped we never have to use this place, But you can’t imagine how happy I am that I got bored that day.”

“I wonder what things are like on the outside?” Clarence asked.

“The radiation level is tolerable partner,” Ron pointed out, “But I’ll bet there are a lot of panicked people.”

“The nightmare I’ve always had was what would happen when all those people started streaming out of the San Fernando Valley,” Gary said. “They will be sick, tired and hungry. And no doubt some of them will have guns.”

“I never thought of that Gary,” Clarence reflected. “But I think maybe you’re right. Do you think we’ll be able to get out of this shelter without getting our heads blown off?”

“I’ve given that a little thought my friend and I think we can get out ok, but I’m not certain what we’re going to find,” Gary responded. “That’s why I wanted all of the firepower. I wanted to put in a block wall on both sides and a block and wrought iron enclosure on the front. But I got started way too late on the whole thing. So, I made the shelter the first priority.”

“Next time you build a shelter,” Ron chuckled, “Use the entire back yard and connect the sewage to the city sewer. I guess I never thought about what it would be like living in a 20x30 room for 2 weeks with 23 other people.”

“You said that the radiation level is tolerable, Ron,” Clarence said, “What is tolerable?”

“I printed out an article I found on the net, Clarence,” Ron replied, “There’s no simple answer. It was one of the best articles I ever read on the subject though. I stuck it in my suitcase and you can read it later.”

“I just thought that if the radiation level were low, we could leave early,” Clarence said.

“Clarence, there’s that 10/7 rule we need to observe,” Gary added. “The rule says that for every seven fold increase in time radioactivity will decrease by tenfold. The rule of sevens effectively covers the period of time it takes radioactive fallout to fall to 1/1000 of the initial level. We have those potassium iodide or iodate pills to take after we leave the shelter and prevent radiation from building up in the thyroid.”

“You didn’t answer my question,” Clarence said. “Can we leave early or not?”

“No!” Ron and Gary chorused.

“Well ok,” Clarence accepted, “But Ron’s right Gary, next time build a bigger bomb shelter.”

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There were so many downsides to 24 people living in a shelter that was only designed to hold 6 people. Showers had to be scheduled and enough time allowed between for people to use the only toilet. They couldn’t cook many of the food items because they consumed too much electricity. At least this alleviated the problem of a steady diet of beans (wink). But people who aren’t allowed to move around and exercise become restless, no matter what movie there is to watch or puzzle to assemble. It simply hadn’t been practical or possible to run either a weekend test with 20+ people or a two-week test with the six of them. But, they’d solved the mechanical problems associated with living in the shelter. Fourteen days was 336 hours; thus to stay in the shelter for the ‘mandatory’ 343 hours they had to remain for 14 days and 7 hours. That meant that they could leave around 10:30pm PST on the November 26, 2005.

Obviously Palmdale hadn’t been directly hit; KTPI was still on the air. Wearing headphones so as not to disturb the others, Ron monitored KPTI-AM, Clarence KTPI-FM and Gary searched the Ham bands gathering such news as was available. It was becoming apparent that the government had been better prepared for this ‘event’ than anyone thought possible. Had Kerry taken a smart pill, or perhaps realized that he wasn’t really up to the task and just passed the buck? FEMA was in charge; that much was apparent. They were telling everyone to do this and not do that and were promising that the government would begin supplying food by the end of the initial 2-week period that it would take to get everything organized. Yeah right! From the National Food Stockpile that was next to the Strategic Petroleum Reserve? I don’t think so, but what do I know? When did the government stop buying commodities? 1994? Earlier?

After a few days in the shelter, time began to lose meaning. Only the artificially created days and nights and a large calendar on the wall with the days crossed off gave the 24 people any sense of the uniform flow of time. There were some minor ‘miracles’ that occurred that changed a lot of things. KTPI announced that the water supply had been thoroughly tested and was safe to drink. Gary flipped the cutoff switch and refilled the water tanks. Three days later KTPI announced that the natural gas service had been

restored. Gary flipped the gas cutoff switch, shut down the generator and changed the valve. After a little tweaking of the carburetor, the generator was again running smoothly on natural gas, albeit at the reduced 10.5kw level rather than at the 12kw level that propane provided. Although they now had power 24/7 The Three Amigos decided that they would be better off maintaining the artificial day/night routine.

With the extra water available The Three Amigos said people could take longer showers, but that didn't really change anything because the hot water heater only held 19 gallons. They were only able to maintain order as time slowly passed by maintaining rigid discipline. And, this was a group of civilians not particularly accustomed to rigid discipline. The possibility of someone leaving the shelter early had been dealt with at the outset. A padlock was locked on the hasp and ring on the inside of the door and Clarence wore the key on a chain around his neck. The spare padlock key, by the way, was in a magnetic box on the inside of the generator cover.

With only a little over 3 days remaining out of the 343 hours, the men began to plan for the exit. It would be late at night, reducing the likelihood of someone being there to greet them as they emerged. They had 3 M1A's, 3 shotguns, 3 .22LR rifles, 5 Ruger Vaqueros, 3 Winchester rifles, the guns in Ron's gun collection, Clarence's .38 revolver plus Gary's 2 pistols. There were more than enough guns to go around; Ron could have armed everyone with his gun collection alone. They didn't have any night vision equipment, due in part to an oversight and in part to a lack of funds. The funds problem had forced them to concentrate on essentials and a pair of night vision binoculars hadn't been considered essential.

Although they had an ample number of firearms, they didn't intend to pass them out willy-nilly. Dick, Chris and Matt were given a Winchester in .45 Colt. David and his 4 boys got the 3 shotguns and 2 rifles from Ron's collection. The Three Amigos would carry their M1A's and wear their pistols or revolver. Ron selected revolvers or pistols for the women according to their preferences. The women who had only a vague familiarity with firearms were given .357 Magnum revolvers loaded with .38 Special ammo or given nothing at all. The guns were assigned, but not issued, until needed.

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Uncertain of what awaited them, there was a tension in the atmosphere in the shelter on the day of their 'coming out'. Figuring the condemned were entitled to a hearty meal, they had thawed steaks and baked some potatoes. There was no lettuce for a salad so they opened a few cans of mushrooms to sauté. A hour before their departure, they placed red cellophane over the emergency lights and with 30 minutes to go turned off the lights, bathing the shelter in a dim, red glow. The firearms, which had been loaded earlier, were passed out and at 10:30pm Clarence unlocked the door. Using his reconditioned Civil Defense survey meter, Gary checked the radiation level in the stairwell and found it to be normal. He then triggered the remote control and opened that hatch. The people with the shotguns were the first out of the shelter, followed immediately by the others. It was a cool night and the skies were clear. He called for everyone to come out.

After bundling up against the coolness, everyone came out of the shelter to get a first breath of fresh air in 2 weeks. The men went to the house and searched it carefully. There was no evidence that anything had been disturbed or that the house had been broken into. Dick relit the hot water heater and furnace for Gary and the group of men did a once around the Moon Shadows housing tract, looking for anything out of the ordinary. There appeared to be no problems and after a brief conversation, and a second check with the meter, Chris and Patti and the kids returned to their home, absent the firearms. Dick also handed over the rifle saying his shotgun would give him any protection he might require and he went to his home.

After a brief conversation followed by an even briefer argument, that included such mundane topics as family lineage and the like, the insolent pup (Kevin) returned to the shelter to spend what everyone hoped would be his last night in the shelter. The Three Amigos couldn't see any signs of trouble, but they were uneasy. Although water and natural gas service had been restored, there were no streetlights, indicating the power had yet to be restored. The men had made a quick decision to remain near the shelter until the morning when they'd have the light of day to better gauge their situation by. Kevin had wanted, naturally, to return home so he could get back in his room and sleep in privacy.

For some reason, a song was bouncing around in Gary's head. Remember the chorus to "Tin Man"?

*Oh, Oz never did give nothing to the Tin Man
That he didn't, didn't already have
And Cause never was the reason for the evening
Or the tropic of Sir Galahad*

Better yet, remember the name of the group who recorded it? (America) The reason that the lyric was bouncing around in his brain might have to do with the fact that the 24 of them had managed to survive the first 2 weeks in the aftermath of what might prove to be the worst terrorist strike in the history of the world; at least in modern times. And they had done so by their own efforts. Oz hadn't given them anything either. They'd done it with sweat, money, imagination and one man's crackpot belief that there was no such thing as being over prepared. Over prepared was having 200,000 rounds of .308 ammo for your one M1A rifle. They had 6 1,000-round cases of surplus plus 1,000-rounds of Match ammo per M1A rifle. If anything, they were under prepared.

*You see I've been through the desert on a horse with no name
It felt good to be out of the rain
In the desert you can remember your name
'Cause there ain't no one for to give you no pain
La, la ...*

The Three Amigos – Chapter 4 – The Morning After

*There's got to be a morning after
If we can hold on through the night;
We have a chance to find the sunshine –
Let's keep on lookin' for the light.*

No one got much sleep that night, either the people who stayed in the shelter or the people who stayed in the house. By the time the sun came up the men folk were ready to go. They needed to check Ron and Linda's home, Clarence and Lucy's home and David and Lorrie's home. Since this didn't appear to be the time for timidity, they loaded their weapons and began to check on the homes. The first two, Ron's, and Clarence's, were intact without any sign of damage. However, as they neared the area where David and Lorrie's home had been they could see that a 4-block area of homes had burnt to the ground and their house was among those lost. Good luck on trying to collect on an insurance claim on that home, they figured. To get to the area, they had crossed Palmdale Boulevard on 40th Street East and gone to Avenue Q and then west. In so doing, they had avoided a couple of roadblocks on Palmdale Boulevard East; one at 20th Street East and one at 30th Street East.

However, when they took 22nd Street to Palmdale Boulevard and turned east to return home, they found themselves between the two Sheriff's Department roadblocks. City trucks blocked off 25th Street, so they had no choice except to proceed to the 30th Street roadblock. Ron looked in the mirror, apparently considering turning around and retracing their steps, but a patrol car was behind them, too. Had they not been armed to the teeth, one can suppose that the Deputy might have waived them through, but given their firearms, the Deputy at the roadblock wanted to see some ID. When he took David's he must have realized that the address was in the burnt out area. The remainder of the ID's got a casual glance and he had a word or two about transporting firearms in the trunks of the vehicles. After the lecture, he let them go, but the patrol car followed them all of the way back to the Moon Shadows tract.

They got out of the car and went into the house. The patrol car lingered for a moment or two, the Deputy was on the radio, and then left. The LA County Sheriff had noticed them but it was too early to speculate what it all meant. The suppressors had not been mounted on the M1A's and the magazines were stuffed in their pockets, so unless the Deputy was familiar with the Surefire Fast Attach mount, he shouldn't have suspected anything. Well, they did technically break the law by not having the weapons in the trunk, but if he were going to push that, he would have instead of chewing their butts. And, that Deputy who followed them was probably just verifying that they lived where they claimed. And, the harder they tried to convince themselves that this was the case, the less they believed it.

David and the boys had left to give Lorrie the bad news. Knowing Lorrie as he did, Gary knew that she'd be pretty upset, but would get over it quickly. They'd lost possessions but were alive and possessions could be replaced. He warned Sharon that the kids had

lost their home and that Lorrie would be around seeking answers, which they didn't have, and comfort. Then he went back into the living room where Ron and Clarence were sitting.

"Did either of you see any people besides those Deputies?" Gary asked.

"Say, now that you mention it I didn't see anyone," Ron said. "How about you Clarence?"

"Just that roadblock at 20th Street when I looked over my shoulder, that patrol car that was following us and the roadblock at 30th Street," Clarence responded. "That's mighty strange. A town of 125,000 and not a soul in sight."

Just about that exact moment Patti came barging in the front door like she owned the place. And she didn't stop when the door was ½ open as she usually did and call out; she barged right in and closed the door.

"There's something wrong," Patti announced. "I went to check on Darlene and she and the kids were gone. Chris went over to Dave's and there was no one there either. So, Chris and Dick went door to door and the only people in this housing tract are those of us that were in the shelter."

"We went and checked on the houses Patti," Gary explained. "Ron and Clarence's homes were ok but we didn't see any people. That area between 20th East and 22nd East north of the mall there was all burned out and David and Lorrie lost their home. We were just talking about the fact that the only people we saw were some Deputy Sheriffs."

"Did one of those Deputies follow you guys home?" Patti asked.

"Yes. And he stopped for a moment or two and made a radio call," Gary explained. "But he left."

"Not really," Patti replied, "There's a patrol car parked across the street from the entrance to the tract."

"Ron was there anything on KTPI about an evacuation?" Gary asked.

"Not a word," Ron replied. "It was 55 minutes of uninterrupted music followed by 5 minutes of very uninformative news. Come to think of it Gar-Bear, I didn't hear a single commercial starting about the 3rd day. And they must have changed announcers, too. There was some new guy I never heard before starting the fourth day."

"Patti, why don't you go get Dick and the rest of your family?" Gary suggested. "I don't like this one bit. It sort of reminds me of a movie I saw on the Sci-Fi Channel once and I don't like it. We all need to talk this over. And, tell Dick to bring whatever guns he has."

"I'll be back in a little while," Patti agreed. "All of our food is in your shelter anyway."

"I remember that movie Gar," Ron said, "It was some sort of a monster movie. You aren't thinking monsters are you?"

"The only monsters there are Ronald," Gary replied, "Are in the movies and in the hearts of men. But, you know, the traffic on Ham radio started to drop off to the point that there wasn't very much at all. You would have expected just the opposite."

"Something else is a little strange, Partner," Ron pointed out. "Why is Adelphia still off the air? That satellite system they have picks up every channel in the country. They just pick and choose what to broadcast according to the FCC rules. And, they have their own news staff and backup power, so why aren't they on the air?"

"You are making me really wish I'd built the fence around the front of the house," Gary commented. "And we aren't so well off as before, either. There is less than 1,000 gallons of propane left if the natural gas gets cut off again. We'd eventually run out of power."

Just then, Patti, Chris, Matt, Daniel and Dick came into the house without the benefit of knocking. Chris had the radio case and Dick was carrying a shotgun, and a Ruger 10/22 rifle. Matt was helping Dick out and he had a box that appeared to contain some ammo and Dick's 2-meter transceiver.

"I've got some more radio gear at the house Gary," Dick said. "Matt and I'll go get it and we'll be right back."

"I brought the racing radios Gary," Chris announced.

"Ron why don't you get John and Kevin to get some fans running and air out that shelter real good?" Gary suggested. "And have them restock what we used in the shelter from the stores in the shed."

Ron left to unlock the shed and get John to set up the fans and start moving the extra food and toilet paper and whatever else they used to the shelter. He didn't even bother to ask Kevin. The shelter had been tolerable, barely. Gary had special ordered 2 65-pint Whirlpool dehumidifiers from Lowe's and they had run at full capacity the entire 2 weeks, keeping the humidity at a barely tolerable 50%. They required a lot of watching, too. You would have thought that the manufacturer would have put in a large catch pail. John was more than willing to help out and Ron suggested that a couple of David's boys give John a hand.

Those trial runs had led Gary to add the air purifiers and the dehumidifiers. Had it been up to Ron, he would have just added one of each, but Gary always thought in big terms and he'd added 2 of the 65 pint dehumidifiers and 2 of the 550ft² air purifiers. At the

time, Ron thought his pal was crazy. But, it turned out he was crazy like a fox. The units were even Energy-Star appliances with high efficiency and low power consumption. About the only thing Gary had screwed the pouch on was the amount of propane in tank and Ron admitted to himself that it was partly his fault. He'd never thought they'd ever be underground for 2 weeks without natural gas and hadn't looked for the tank when he should. Gary had filled the tank as rapidly as his limited funds allowed. Ron had been wrong, but that was just so much spilt milk, he told himself.

When Dick and Matt had returned with the remainder of Dick's things, they noticed a patrol car pulling into the tract. They were barely inside the house when the car pulled up out front and stopped. Four Deputies got out of the car and one of them, a Sergeant, came to the door and rang the bell.

"You may not remember me Gary," the Sergeant said, "I'm Johnny Jones, Darlene's ex-husband. Can we talk?"

"I guess," Gary said, "Come in, Johnny."

"Hey Chris," Johnny said entering the living room. "How are you folks making out?"

"We're ok," Gary responded. "What's going on and where are all of the people?"

"The people are ok, Gary," Johnny replied. "By order of FEMA, we were forced to round everyone up and house them at the area High Schools. They really didn't give us much choice in the matter, you know."

"Is that why you're here?" Gary asked, "To round us up too?"

"The people are being released and allowed to return to their homes," Johnny said. "So long as they have an adequate supply of food on hand. I assume that you have an adequate supply of food on hand?"

"I can feed all 24 of us for a year so long as we don't get too picky about what we eat," Gary replied.

"Where were you folks?" Johnny asked, "We checked every house and there was no one here."

"I have a storm shelter Johnny," Gary said, not offering any details.

"Is there anything you folks need?" Johnny asked.

"I could use about 4,000 gallons of propane," Gary said.

"AmeriGas is back making limited deliveries," Johnny explained, "I'll pass it along to them. Anything else you folks need?"

“News, Johnny,” Gary said, “What in the hell is going on out there?”

“I don’t really know what is going on folks,” Johnny shrugged. “The feds clamped on a total news blackout. They even put an Army DJ in at the only Valley radio station on the air, KTPI.”

“I don’t understand,” Gary said.

“I don’t either,” Johnny admitted. “The President issued an Executive Order, something about a clear and present danger and imposed martial law. The only troops we’ve seen are some federalized CNG people, and a few FEMA people. Everyone is as tight lipped as I’ve ever seen.”

“What about us Johnny?” Chris asked. “They going to drag us to the camp?”

“No Chris, you have food and resources so you people don’t meet the criteria. Besides, what they don’t know won’t hurt them, right?”

“What’s with the extra Deputies?” Ron asked.

“Normal precaution for an abnormal time,” Johnny said. “Well I’ve got to be going. Keep your powder dry.”

Johnny returned to the car and the 4 Deputies climbed in and left.

“What do you suppose he meant by that?” Clarence asked.

“Meant by what Clarence?” Ron asked.

“That crack about *keep your powder dry*,” Clarence explained.

“It’s just an expression, Clarence,” Gary said, “It means be careful.”

“I knows that Gary,” Clarence said, “But I don’t believe that’s what that Deputy had in mind.”

With all of the references to ‘enough food’ they concluded that it wouldn’t do them any good to go to a grocery store to stock up. Besides, they didn’t really absolutely need anything. What meat they had could be stretched and there was no shortage of staples. And then, Ron did a strange thing. He took a card out of his wallet and called a number scribbled on the back.

“Sandy,” the call was answered.

“Ron Green,” Ron said. “What’s your situation?”

"I'm at home obviously," Sandy said. "We weathered the 2 weeks in our shelter. There are some strange things going on, though."

"We know, Sandy," Ron said, "Look the reason I called was to see how well supplied you are with merchandise."

"I had more stuff at home than I did in the store," Sandy replied, "And we emptied out that store starting early, so everything I have is here."

"How's my credit?" Ron asked.

"Normally good, Ron," Sandy replied, "But these are cash and carry times. But you have a lot of guns Ron. I should know, I sold them all to you. Maybe we could work out some kind of trade."

Ron had 6 5.56 bolt-action rifles and about 5 cases of 5.56 ammo. He also had an extensive collection of handguns in oddball calibers. With each handgun purchase, Ron had purchased a single box of ammo. He had shot up about ½ a box of ammo in each of the handguns and had saved the other ½ box so he had some ammo on hand. A lot of the guns were presentation grade and having fired the guns; Ron had cleaned them and stored them, probably never to be fired again. They loaded everything in his collection, except for the M1A, the Winchester and the Vaquero and the .357 Magnums, together will all of the ammo for the guns they were taking and The Three Amigos headed for Sandy's home.

"All of these Ron?" Sand asked. "Are you sure? I'll give you 90 cents on the dollar of what you paid for the guns as a credit. But, that's absolutely the best I can do. What are you looking for?"

"You had some Garand rifles in the 7.62x51mm caliber in the store Sandy," Ron said, "Do you still have any?"

"You mean those Fulton Armory rifles?" Sandy asked. "I couldn't give them away. Is that what you're interested in?"

"Those, some 8-round clips, 7.62x51mm, a 20" barrel for a Remington 870 (Dick's shotgun), and some .357 Magnum and .45 Colt ammo," Ron replied.

"I'll give you my cost for that ammo you have and add that to the credit," Sandy said. "You should have enough credit to take all 8 of the Fulton Armory 7.62x51mm Garand's, the 20" barrel, and a few thousand rounds of ammo."

"Stack it up Sandy," Ron said, "You have yourself a deal."

Sandy took Ron's weapons and ammo to her basement and she and her husband re-

turned carrying the Garand rifles. They went back to the basement and brought up 8 cases of the surplus (8,000 rounds), 4 cases of .357 Magnum (1,000 rounds) and 4 cases of .45 Colt (1,000 rounds). She also had 2 plastic bags of 100 empty 8-round M1 Garand enbloc clips. Ron and Clarence began to load the purchases into Ron's car and Gary stepped up.

"Sandy, I could use some of the 7.62 and .45 Colt if you have more," Gary said.

"Name your poison Gary, its \$150 a case for the 7.62 surplus and \$175 a case on the .45 Colt," Sandy said.

"Give me 5 cases of the 7.62 surplus, 2 cases of the .45 Colt and a case of .45ACP Gold Dot," Gary said.

"That will be \$1,300, Gary," Sandy said, "Are you sure you want to spend that much money at a time like this?"

"No, but I need the ammo anyway," Gary admitted, "So you get it for me and I count out the money."

After Ron and Clarence finished hauling their things to the car, they started carrying Gary's ammo to the car. By this time, the car was riding low in the rear. Clarence picked up 2 cases of shotgun ammo for Dick, one each of 12-pellet 00 buck and 1-ounce slugs. They now had 31 1,000-round cases of 7.62 surplus plus the 3,000 rounds of Match ammo. They had a total of 14 cases of .45 Colt and 5 cases of .357 Magnum. In addition, Ron had one case of .38 Special. And, they had 4 cases of 15-pellet 00 Buck and 4 cases of 1 $\frac{3}{8}$ ounce slugs, 1 case of 12-pellet and one case of 1oz slugs plus all that surplus 5.56 and 7.62 plus 30 bricks of .22LR and Gary's Gold Dot. They returned to the house and got everyone to help them unload their haul. They had just about finished when an AmeriGas 3,000-gallon delivery truck showed up. They moved the car so the driver could back into the driveway. His hose would just reach the inlet pipe for the tank.

While the driver filled the tank Ron visited with him. They'd known each other for a long time, dating back to when Ron had worked for AmeriGas. The driver told Ron, when asked, that the only rental tank left was a 2,200-gallon commercial tank. No one had wanted to rent it, he said, because of the requirement that it be fully filled after it was installed. Ron told the guy not to leave before he had a chance to visit with him again. Ron went to talk to Linda.

"Lyn, how much cash do we have?" Ron asked.

"I did what you wanted, Ron and took all the extra cash out of our account," Linda said.

"Yes, but how much is that, honey?" Ron asked.

"\$12,500," Linda said, "Why?"

“Well, I pretty much steered Gar wrong on the getting that propane tank put in, Lyn,” Ron explained. “The only rental tank that AmeriGas has is a 2,200-gallon tank and they’ll only put that in if you make a purchase of 2,000-gallons of propane. I was thinking that we should have that tank here.”

“How much will 2,000-gallons of propane run, Ronald?” Lyn asked, her eyebrows rising.

“About \$3,500,” Ron replied.

“That’s a lot of money Ron,” Linda observed.

“I know babe,” Ron said, “But I was thinking we ought to stay here, close by the shelter and besides, we owe our butts to crazy old Gar-Bear.”

“Well, you do whatever you think is right Ronald,” Lyn said, “But there probably won’t be any money when this is gone, so keep that in mind.”

“Thanks babe,” Ron said, leaving to have a talk with the AmeriGas driver.

“When could you put that tank in?” Ron asked his friend.

“Later this afternoon Ron,” the driver replied. “I’ll send them over with the tank and a crane to set it. I’ll need \$700 for this delivery and we’ll bill the balance.”

“I’ll get Gary for you,” Ron said.

After Gary paid the driver and the delivery truck departed, Ron explained to Gary that he’d arranged for the delivery of a rental tank and would pay for the first shipment of propane. After that, it would be up to Gary to keep the tank topped off.

Gary was lost in thought, comparing what was happening to all of those stories he’d written about the 3 of them surviving in Moon Shadows. In his stories, Gary had a much more elaborate setup with hidden gunrooms, water tanks on patio roofs, etc. In some ways, the real experience paralleled his stories. He always had M1A rifles and suppressors, but in some ways the reality was far different from the fiction. He’d never crammed 24 people in one 600ft² room in any of his stories. They had never crawled out of a cramped shelter after 2 weeks to find a deserted town. And, in most of his stories, the first thing they’d done was start scrounging.

Before they’d ever gone into the shelter, for real, they’d set out the cots. One went along the east wall and one against the west wall. Then, they’d put in a row of 7 cots perpendicular to the east and west walls and two cots in the center. There was just room for 18 cots. But, the cots were right up against each other and that hadn’t permitted any movement during the night. Audrey and Junior slept on one cot, reducing the total to 17 and Jeffrey slept with Lorrie further reducing the number to 16. That left a barely nego-

tiable space in center where there otherwise have been 2 cots. In the end, the only people who couldn't get up and move around freely at night were the people in the beds against the wall. Adjustments were made to accommodate those people, like Ron, who frequently got up during the night. But any way you looked at it, it had not been easy. They had 18 cots, but only ended up using 16. In theory at least, they could have taken 2 more people into the shelter. But, 24 had proven to be almost too many.

And what now? They had food, water, and natural gas until it was shut off again, 4,000-gallons of propane and more coming. They had weapons and ammo. And, if Johnny were to be believed, not even the LA County Sheriff's Department knew what was going on around the country. Say, come to think about it, Johnny hadn't said what had happened in Los Angeles itself. And, if the LA County Sheriff didn't know what was going on in his own County, no one did. Obviously, Johnny had not been totally forthcoming. Why was that, had LA been hit really hard?

At least they'd improved their situation considerably by making the deal with Sandy. Gary had dug around in a box and come up with his old 7-round mag extension and spring for the 870 he had at one time. That allowed Dick to up his 870 to a 7-round riot gun plus one up the pipe. They had just enough 7.62 rifles so that almost each male had one, except for Daniel, of course. Ron didn't trust Kevin with a gun and John was more than happy with a shotgun and a .357 revolver.

Late in the afternoon of their first full day out of the shelter, three trucks pulled up out in front. One was a crane, the second a transport with 3 concrete tank stands and a large propane tank and the third was the propane delivery truck. Two men got out of the trucks, grabbed shovels and went into the back yard where they began to level places for the tank stands. The crane lifted the stands to the backyard and set them in place. The tank went next and when it was settled, the delivery truck started to fill the tank. The driver gave some heavy-duty hose to Ron, and Dick and Ron were busy connecting the fill line of the larger tank to the outlet valve on the new storage tank. By the time the tank was filled, everything was plumbed together. Dick's regular job was for Southern California Gas Company as an installer. From start to finish, it had taken under 2 hours to set the new tank, plumb it and fill it. They now had 7,000-gallons of propane on hand.

The shelter was well aired out and that night the women and younger children spent the night in the shelter, albeit with the door and hatch open. They did a head count before bed, because Ron hadn't seen Kevin for most of the day. The headcount confirmed that Kevin had gone missing. Who knew where he was? Ron hoped that Kevin at least had the good sense to go home, he had extra insulin and syringes there. Linda wanted Ron to go look for Kevin, but Ron reminded her that the Deputy Sergeant had said they were under national martial law and though the Deputy hadn't said, he presumed that meant a dusk to dawn curfew. He would go check on Kevin in the morning, he told her. But, if Kevin wasn't at their home, he wasn't going to look any further. Kevin was old enough to know better than to run off and if that was his choice, Ron wasn't going to interfere. Kevin, Ron said, was the prodigal son and he'd had 4 chances to come home and clean up his act. That was 3 more chances than Kevin deserved, he also pointed out.

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They had slept a little better that night. David, his 4 boys and John had kept watch. Chris and Patti had returned home to sleep, as had Dick. Ron and Clarence had taken the bunks beds in Amy's room and Gary had slept in his own bed. The others made do with the recliners and couch and floor in the Living Room. Aside from a patrol car once every 4 hours, the night had been uneventful. There were a few loose ends to attend to, the missing prodigal son, more clothes from home and any other staples they might have on hand to move to Gary and Sharon's. They had a brief discussion the evening before. Lorrie and David were obviously staying; they had no place to go to. And the other 6 adults had decided that maybe they ought to stay close by the shelter until they had more information and knew where they stood.

Gary, Ron, Clarence and John went to check on Kevin and pick up extra clothing and the remaining staples. This time John took one of the Garand rifles instead of a shotgun. The previous night, while they pulled guard duty, all 200 of the Garand clips had been charged. John was wearing a coat with large pockets and the pockets were filled with the 8-round clips. Frankly, no one knew what they might run into. What they found at Ron and Linda's was evidence that Kevin had been there and gone. His clothing was missing, as was his supply of insulin and syringes. The pet raccoon was dead in its cage and Ron took a couple of minutes to dig a hole and bury the animal. Then, Ron and John gathered up extra clothing and laundry soap. They also gathered the few remaining staples and the four men moved on to Clarence's home. While Clarence filled a couple of suitcases, the other three emptied the kitchen of usable staples. They strapped Clarence's suitcases on the roof of the car and returned to Moon Shadows.

After they got home and had unloaded everything, Ron filled Linda in on the Kevin situation. Kevin had been home and was gone, he said. He had his clothes and insulin, Ron explained and it was too risky to go looking for him. Kevin, Ron said, would know to come here if they weren't at home waiting for him. Besides, Ron said, something was very, very wrong here and they had to take care of themselves.

Gary picked up the phone and called the Sheriff's Department. He was the fellow out on Moonraker Road and they were interested in improving their security. Was there any chance they could send Johnny Jones around to talk to them? It wasn't five minutes before Johnny pulled up in front of the house, alone this time.

"Dang, that was fast service," Gary said.

"What are you talking about?" Johnny asked.

"I just called the Sheriff's Department and asked them to send you around," Gary explained.

"And I need to speak to Ron Green," Johnny said. "He's here isn't he?"

“Yes, come in Johnny,” Gary said. “What do you need to talk to Ron about?”

The Three Amigos – Chapter 5 – The Highway to Ventura

*'Cause the free wind is blowin' through your hair
And the days surround your daylight there
Seasons crying no despair
Alligator lizards in the air, in the air*

Did di di di dit ...

Johnny ignored Gary's question. When he got inside, he said, "Ron Green?"

"You caught me, partner," Ron replied good naturedly, "What can I do for you?"

"Do you have a son name Kevin Green?" Johnny asked.

"A step-son named Kevin, yes. Why?" Ron asked suddenly alarmed.

"The CHP picked him up late last night on Highway 126, the highway to Ventura," Johnny said. "He was driving his mother's car, but was out after curfew and doesn't have a driver's license."

"Is he all right?" Ron asked.

"He got pretty mouthy with the CHP and they had to tap him on the noggin, but he's ok, yes," Johnny said.

"Where is he?" Ron asked.

"In the jail in Ventura," Johnny explained, "And the car is in the impound yard. Now if he had permission to drive the car, he will only be charged with speeding and resisting arrest. If he didn't have permission to drive the car, he will also be charged with Grand Theft Auto."

"And if he had permission," Ron said, "What about the car?"

"Under the law, it will be impounded for 30-days," Johnny said. "The fees will run from \$1,000 to \$1,200."

"Really?" Ron responded surprised. "And if he didn't have permission?"

"He'll get 3-years and a fine that could run up to \$5,000," Johnny explained. "Plus you'll probably have to hire a lawyer for him."

"Been there, done that," Ron replied. "Hang on a minute while I talk to his mother."

"How's Sandy?" Johnny asked Gary.

“Sandy who?” Gary responded.

“Sandy your friendly gun dealer running her gunshop out of her home, Sandy,” Johnny replied. “You guys must have gotten a lot, the car was on its springs.”

“You have a log of when I pee too?” Gary snapped.

“He didn’t have permission to take the car,” Ron said returning to the room. “And tell him he can use a public defender, we aren’t going to bail him out this time.”

“Ok Ron,” Johnny said. “Gary, you might be surprised what we know about you Three Amigos. What did you want to talk to me about?”

“I’d like to put up a fence to protect the front of the house Johnny,” Gary explained.

“So what’s stopping you?” Johnny asked.

“Information Johnny,” Gary said. “Are we free to travel and get fencing materials? What about the roadblocks? Are there any stores open that sell fencing material?”

“If it was me,” Johnny said, “I get to that feed and grain where you usually buy your propane for your barbeque Gary, down on Sierra Highway. They sell barbed wire and those 10’ steel posts for cyclone fence. I’d buy myself some of those posts, some Sackrete to set them in and a lot of barbed wire. Did you know you can make concertina out of barbed wire by unrolling it two turns and pulling a loop off the end?”

“Uh, yeah, I knew that, Johnny,” Gary replied. “Say, how come you haven’t given us any news about Los Angeles?”

“I told you there was a news blackout didn’t I?” Johnny asked.

“Yes, but you’d have to know what happened in LA, Johnny,” Gary insisted.

“I didn’t say that I didn’t know what was going on in LA Gary. I said that I didn’t know what was going on around the country,” Johnny replied.

“So what is going on in LA Johnny?” Gary asked.

“I can’t tell you because of the news blackout, sorry fellas,” Johnny replied.

“You can’t say good or bad?” Gary pressed.

Johnny paused to make sure he had everyone attention. “I just can’t say, sorry,” Johnny replied looking at the floor and shaking his head.

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You Three Amigos? Wait a minute here, obviously someone in the Sheriff's Department read Gary's fiction on the Frugal Squirrel website. But the question remained unanswered whether the Sheriff's Department had been watching them or had been watching Sandy. And what was this 'where you buy your propane for your gas grill' stuff; or the careful advice about how to put in a barbed wire and concertina fence? It was obviously some very good advice that Gary intended to take. And, how were they going to haul all of that stuff? Dave's pickup and trailer were sitting there across the street.

"Chris, do you know where Dave keeps the keys to his pickup?" Gary asked.

"On his keychain," Chris replied, "But if you want to use his truck, he has a spare key in a magnetic key box in the engine compartment."

"Do you suppose he'd mind if we borrowed his pickup and trailer?" Gary asked.

"Probably," Chris said, "But he's not around to ask is he?"

"That was some good advice Johnny just gave us about the fence, fellas," Gary said. "Maybe we ought to take it. I've got about \$800 cash left."

"I can match that, Clarence offered.

"I will too, Gar-Bear," Ron added. "Can we do what we have to do on \$2,400?"

"We won't know until we try, will we?" Gary responded. "But let me get some measurements first."

It was 45' from the fence to the sidewalk on either side of the house. The lot was 65' wide. That meant that each stand of wire had to be about 155' + 2' to enclose the front. Wait a minute, what about a gate? Add 2' and subtract 3' to allow for the extra ends and the gate itself. So, 156' per strand total. Barbed wire came in 200-yard and 400-yard spools the last Gary knew and one strand per foot for 7' added up to 364 yards. One spool would handle that. The concertina was going to be a problem, though. Standard military concertina was 2 opposing strands of wire and they wouldn't be able to create that stuff easily. Six foot of wire would form about a 2' loop and 9' foot of wire would form a 3' loop. Therefore, a 400-yard spool would form 133 3' loops. They had better figure on about 3 400-yard spools of wire per row of concertina and on 5 rows. That made for a total of 16 spools. Since the lot was 125' deep that meant that the side fences were 80' long and with the back fence a total of 225', 5 spools ought to put one row of concertina on top of the fence. So, they needed 21 400-yard rolls of barbed wire in total plus posts and 2 gates, one 3' wide for the sidewalk and one 16' wide for the driveway. Say 5 posts on each side plus 9 for the front. Make it 20 posts, just in case. Gary had his shopping list and they were ready to go. Figure on a sack of Sackrete per post.

All of that would fit in Chris's pickup and in one passenger car, so they wouldn't have to borrow Dave's pickup and trailer after all. So, off they went with their \$2,400, Chris's pickup and Ron's car. They would need a posthole auger too and wire ties to attach the barbed wire. Maybe they'd better buy 2 posthole augers if they could afford it. If only it had been that simple. They got the posts, barbed wire, Sackrete, and 1 3' wide 6' high gate and 2 8' wide 6' high gates at the feed and grain, but they didn't have posthole augers. On a wild guess, Gary stopped by Lowe's home improvement. And, they were open but only God knows why, there weren't more than 6 customers in the whole store. Gary bought an Earthquake, 1 Man Powerhead Gas Powered Auger and an Ardisam 6" Earth Auger that would dig a hole 32" deep. With the power equipment, they had the holes in, the poles in and the Sackrete poured by the end of the day. And, it wasn't a bad day's work at that, all things being considered. The feed and grain only had 22 400-yard rolls of wire, so they bought the extra roll, just in case.

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The first thing that they did that morning was to hang the gates and make sure they worked the way they wanted them to. Chris laid an eyeball on the gates and said that they were pretty flimsy. What they needed, according to Chris was a couple of bars across each gate to give them a little strength. He hopped in his pickup and headed back to the feed and grain to buy more fence posts. The rest of the men began the dangerous task of stringing and stretching the barbed wire. Johnny came by around noon, stopped his patrol car and got out. He looked over what they'd accomplished and grinned. Apparently not everyone needed to get shot in the head to get their attention.

"He sure left with a big grin on his face," Clarence said.

"Either we're doing the right thing, or he thinks we're crazy," Ron suggested.

"Guess it doesn't much matter what he thinks," Gary added, "I know that I'm going to sleep a whole lot better when we get this lot fenced."

Chris had returned and taken the fence poles into his garage. He came over, measured the gates and returned home. A while later, he came back with 2 17' poles and returned home to pick up 2 40" poles. He didn't have a welder he could use, but he had his 1/2" electric drill and an extension cord. At 2' off the ground and 4' off the ground, Chris drilled holes in the sidewalk gate and the poles next to them. Then, using Carriage bolts, Chris mounted some straps he'd formed by bending some 3/8" strapping after heating it with his torch. Each strap was attached to the pole with two bolts. When Chris had the 4 straps installed on the sidewalk gate, he dropped in the 40" section of post.

"There you go," Chris said, "Try that gate out."

"Solid as a rock," Ron offered after shaking on the gate's fencing fabric.

“Good,” Chris said, “Let’s see if it works as well on the car gates.”

Chris then repeated the process only this time it took 6 straps for each rod. A couple of hours later he was finished. Ron checked the car gate and it was nearly as solid as the sidewalk gate. The first layer of barbed wire was also done, effectively fencing off the front yard of the home. They had more than a few scratches from handling that barbed wire, but the property was fenced in on all 4 sides. They had no idea how long it would take to put in the concertina. It might take one day, but more likely two. After he’d finished, Chris had gone to the backyard. Chris had spent some time examining the fence and took a few measurements.

The builders of the housing tract had solved the problem of which way to face the fences in typical fashion by alternating the good sides and the bad sides, a bad side being the side with the 2x4 supports. A number of people planted shrubs to hide the bad side as in the case of Dan and Dawn, Gary’s neighbors to the east. Some neighbor’s just put up with it, like the kids to the west. Gary had always wanted to replace the wood fence with a high concrete block wall. But, at \$30 a lineal foot, had never been able to afford it. And, when finally Sharon and he were in a position to afford it, Gary got caught up in the shelter project and he never did get that block wall finished. He sort of planned to do it when the shelter was done, but it turned out the shelter was never quite done and the fence went wanting.

The fence on Dan’s side of Gary’s backyard didn’t really pose a problem because of the shrubbery, the kids to the west hadn’t planted any shrubs and that fence posed a problem. All a person had to do was yank a few nails and a whole section of fence could be dropped. It would be an understatement to say that this was not a good thing. What Chris had in mind was to switch the good sections of fence and apply them to the other side, effectively making all of Gary and Sharon’s fence sections ‘bad’ sections. Neither neighbor should object, they were getting to decorative side of the fence, assuming they ever showed up to complain in the first place. The next day, Chris was going to Shanghai Matt from the barbed wire fence crew and do a little fencing of his own.

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Chris needed 20 2x4’s ‘stud’ length to complete the modification he had in mind. After Matt and he turned the fence sections, Chris intended to add an extra brace to each fence section. Because of the placement of their home on their lot, Chris figured he might as well get another 10 ‘studs’ and do his fence as well. This was a quick job to accomplish, in his opinion. Matt and he made a run to H & E, also open but nearly devoid of customers, and picked up the 30 studs and 2 boxes of nails. Chris decided to do his fences first for practice, because Gary was such a darned perfectionist. He got all of his extension cords out of his truck and ran power to his house to power the 7½” circular saw.

They pulled down the sections, knocked off the end boards and reversed the section, nailing them into place. The dried out fences had gaps, so Chris didn’t have to be too

precise. He ripped the two boards, cut a notch in the top corner to match the other fence sections and Matt climbed the fence and nailed them in place. Chris climbed a stool and looked over the fence. It looked good to him, so they did all of the remaining fence sections, skipping the step of reinstalling the last two boards. It didn't take very long at all doing it that way and Chris left Matt to put in the strips and he went down to Gary's. He commandeered one of David's boys and by the time Matt was finished with their fence, the two of them had all of the sections switched. Chris left Matt to finish up all of the strips for Gary's fence and returned home to add the third support 2x4. Admittedly, it would have been faster if Chris had kept the power saw, but he had so few boards to cut, the cutting went quickly. He used 6d ring shank nails to attach the fence slats to the new supports and returned to Gary's to add the supports. Matt was about done, so Chris waited for him to finish up so he could use the power saw.

After the new supports were in, Chris intended to let Matt do Dan's side and he'd do the other. It wasn't going to be any picnic trying to add those extra nails while sitting in some bushes. But, Chris had learned a lesson doing his own fence. It was a lot easier to hit the support 2x4 if it was installed flat against the fence rather than on edge. He'd have to try and remember to pull those nails that hit nothing when he had the time.

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Out in front the concertina part of the project was coming along about as well as could be expected. After several abortive starts, they'd figured out that they needed to make a full roll of concertina before attempting to install it. They got two pairs of people busy creating the rings and the old guys stayed inside of the fence and wired the concertina to the barbed wire once they started to install the concertina. They developed a rhythm once they got started with the actual installation of the rolls of wire and things were moving along smoothly. Back when Joe had lived between Gary and Chris in the late '80's Joe had given them several rolls of the wire he used to tie rebar together. Now, it can't be said that the old men were approaching anything like the speed with which Gary remembered Joe tying the rebar, but they were moving along at a fair rate. The people on the other side of the wire had the dirty job anyway, trying to keep those coils of wire separate. And when they got to the east side where Dan had those bushes planted, Gary lost it. He'd been fighting those bushes for a long time and Dan never seemed to trim them up to the property line. Gary told Josh to get an axe out of the garage and get rid of the bushes. If Dan came back, he could mow around the concertina until Gary got around to taking it out.

Having figured out how to prep the concertina, they actually managed to get all 5 rows installed in a single day. Chris and Matt also finished up the fencing in the backyard. All that was left to complete was the 205' of concertina around the backyard fence. When they finished up just before sunset, they stood out front and just admired the fence. The USMC would be pretty proud of that fence, considering it had been conceived by a Deputy Sheriff and installed by a bunch of civilians who didn't really know what they were doing. Anyone driving by 4560 Moonraker Road would get the idea that they probably weren't welcome.

And if, Heaven forbid, any of the squirrels showed up they have to know the name of the ranch in his last story to gain admittance. Gar-Bear had gotten to the point where he wrote the stories just because he enjoyed writing the stories. And if he made the same point often enough, maybe people would listen up and start to prepare for the inevitable. Sometimes Gary felt like a zealot. Sort of a modern day John the Baptist, the voice in the wilderness, only his message wasn't 'Prepare ye the way of the Lord'. His message was far simpler, "Prepare, the life you save may be your own."

They had chili and rice for dinner, one of Gary's favorite meals. He'd picked up a taste for it in the service. Come to think of it a lot of the food they ate had its origins from when he'd been in the Air Force. Gary had eaten Air Force Cooking and Navy Cooking. He far preferred the Navy Cooking. Especially since where he'd been stationed was on submarine rations. [OLF San Nicolas Island, part of the Pacific Missile Test Range.] After dinner The Three Amigos sat and watched a movie just to relax. It was John Wayne in 'She Wore a Yellow Ribbon'.

Thursday, 01Dec05...

"They're all dead, except one, you know," Ron said.

"Who's all dead?" Clarence asked with alarm.

"The actors in that movie we watched last night," Ron said, "All except Harry Carey, Jr. who lives down the road in Saugus."

"Dang Ron, warn a fella when you're going to talk like that," Clarence said, "You scared the crap out of me."

"Oh, is that what I smell?" Ron joked.

"Get serious, guys," Gary butted in, "We have to get the rest of that wire up today."

"And just how are we going to that Gary?" Ron asked. "Glue it on top of the fence?"

"I was going to staple it," Gary said seriously.

"With your Swingline?" Ron laughed.

"No, I was going to suggest we get some more of the steel posts and string some barbed wire between them and spread out the concertina after we tightened the wire," Gary explained. "We only would need about 10 more posts. We can use lag screws to attach them to the 4x4 fence posts and can put some spools of concertina on the wire and then pull the wire tight. Then we use some fence staples to staple the concertina to the top of the fence of the front of the fence, depending upon how high we make the wire."

"I see," Clarence said.

"Then explain it to Ron, Clarence, I'm going to ask Chris to pick up more posts and some lags screws," Gary said, turning to leave.

"Ron, you see what Gary has in mind is..." Clarence started to say.

"Never mind pal, I get it," Ron said, "I was just trying to have a little fun with Gar-Bear."

It ended up that the taller members of the group got the lucky duty of tying off the concertina to the top strand of barbed wire. And, they realized that they only needed one strand, just the one to hold the wire up, except for the back wall. So, while Clarence and Dick wired the concertina in place on the top wire in place Ron and Gary stapled it to the top of the fence. Everyone else was either pulling guard duty or sitting on the back patio laughing at Gary and Ron as they tried to staple the wire to the fence. Clarence and Dick finished up well ahead of Ron and Gary. After they were finally done with the project, spoilsport Chris came along and pulled on the bottom wire along the back fence. In the center areas between the center post and the end posts, the wire pulled in far enough to allow someone to crawl under the concertina. They used molly bolts in the concrete block bent over to hold the bottom wire in place every 10'. The project was now complete.

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Johnny showed up late in the afternoon and asked to be admitted. Gary asked the name of the ranch in his last story and Johnny said Los Tres Amigos. You gotta watch out who you let on that website, it might be an undercover Sheriff's Deputy from LA County Sheriff's Department. Johnny had come to tell them that they had done a fine job on the fence. Johnny couldn't really tell them what he wanted to tell them, but, he could make suggestions, now couldn't he? Like maybe they should maintain a 24-hour guard detail and that it wouldn't really be a bad idea if Dick and Chris and Patti and the kids started spending the nights inside of the fenced in lot. He also suggested that they get something like an air horn to announce trouble to the entire company of people if something unusual happened. Chris agreed, but said that he was bringing his torch in case someone snuck up on them and put a chain and padlock on those gates. The fences would do a good job of keep others out, but they sort of felt like they had just built their own prison.

Gary intended to write this story up someday and post it on the forum too; assuming they got through this alive and there was still a forum to post it on. No doubt others would point out mistakes they'd made along the way. That was perfectly fine with Gary. He didn't claim to be an expert on this stuff and he'd just done the best he could. There might be suggestions offered about how he should have done it and hopefully the newer generations of squirrels would take that advice in the spirit it was offered and consider those suggestions when they made their preparations. When it came to some things,

Gary had no experience and he'd just done the best he could, given the money and circumstances. He was but one of many voices telling people to get prepared and how to do it.

02Dec05...

The folks had accomplished a lot in their first week outside of the shelter. They'd improved their security 10 or even 100 fold and they had lots of propane for when the natural gas went out again. Murphy must have been afraid of all those people in the shelter, too. He'd only made an occasional appearance and then hadn't even followed his own rules. But Murphy always seemed to put in an appearance when you least expected him and they'd held their breaths, figuratively, for the entire 2 weeks waiting for him to show up. And since they were obviously expecting him, Murphy had been hard pressed to make an appearance. Murphy was a persistent Devil, however, and he could wait and catch them napping.

This was the first day since they came out that they weren't burdened by a list of tasks almost too large to manage. In fact, they didn't have any tasks on their agenda for this day except for keeping an eye out for trouble and trying to get some information about what was really happening out there. They didn't know it, but things weren't good. Those 30 nukes had done some damage but, because of the advance notice the White House had put out, a lot of lives had been saved, too. The terrorists had focused on concentrations of people and had exploded multiple dirty bombs in the larger cities and thereby spared smaller cities.

New York City, for example, was well into this preparedness thing and Mayor Bloomberg ordered the power cut in the subway system and herded millions below ground. The financial district was a loss, but a whole lot of people who would have otherwise died, survived. Los Angeles was a study in contrasts. LA had followed New York's example, but the subway system in LA was small. And Californians practically lived in their autos and naturally the first thing they thought of was to throw a few things in the car and take off. The inevitable roadblocks cropped up and despite the best efforts of Law Enforcement, many were caught in the open and exposed to the radiation from the two small nukes. Maybe that was why the Sheriff had clamped a lid on things. While the initial death toll in LA had not been particularly alarming, in the days and weeks that followed, the numbers succumbing to radiation sickness ran way out of proportion.

No effort had been made to clear the traffic jams, because of the initially high levels of radiation, effectively condemning a majority of LA's population to a lingering and painful death. Another study in contrasts was San Francisco with its BART system. Residents of that city, more accustomed to traveling via mass transit, hadn't automatically turned to their autos as their first avenue of escape. There were a lot of sheeple in San Francisco and they did what the leadership had suggested. The Governor, safely tucked away to avoid the radiation in Sacramento, had told the LA County Sheriff to clamp a lid on the news. But the Sheriff had already done so and the order fell on deaf ears.

FEMA had used the military to seize and operate any functional radio and TV stations. The TV stations were simply kept off the air, they were so visual and they typically broadcast pictures of everything. Military announcers manned the radio stations that were allowed to remain on the air and they didn't pass on much news at the top of the hour. All of that would change in the days to come, but for the moment, there wasn't much good news to report. The FEMA mandate had been clear, only report the good news.

The Antelope Valley was an Oasis of sorts. The Valley hadn't been subjected to an attack and the winds were in their favor, thus little radiation had fallen on that area in California. And FEMA had managed to persuade the Governor to round up the people and provide them with food. It would have been far simpler to just distribute the food to the people in their homes, but the government mindset sometimes avoided the obvious and went for the difficult. And, Johnny had been telling the truth, those people who could prove that they were adequately prepared were being allowed to leave the shelters and return home. But, a lot of people refused to give the government details on how much food they had put away, perhaps out of fear that the government would seize the food. Catch-22: is a logical paradox arising from a situation in which an individual needs something that can only be acquired by not being in that very situation; therefore, the acquisition of this thing becomes logically impossible. Catch-22s are often spoken with regard to rules, regulations, procedures, or situations in which one has knowledge of being or becoming a victim but has no control over it occurring. Specifically, Catch-22 ensures that no pilot can ever be grounded for being insane – even if he were.

Most of the carnage in LA was in the Downtown area where the suitcase nuke had been detonated and in the San Fernando Valley. Further south, in Orange County, more of the dirty bombs had been detonated, but there was a strip south of downtown LA where the people had managed to avoid the radiation by crowding into community centers. You know the area; on TV shows, they call it South Central. It was Gangland, USA, the home of the Bloods and the Crips. This one fact, more than any other, had alarmed the Sheriff and he had several of his Deputies in the Antelope Valley Oasis helping residents to form small, well-protected enclaves. There were several in the AV and more were forming each day, despite the slow releases from the temporary camps sponsored by FEMA.

Sandy was an important part of the scheme of things. For one thing, she only took ½ the usual markup on guns and ammo, and sold more merchandise than all of the other gun stores combined. Sometimes she went a little too far to help a good customer, but the Sheriff's Department just made a note and turned a blind eye. Yes, Sandy sold high capacity magazines, but so what? The Sheriff's Department had bigger fish to fry like the booming methamphetamine manufacturing occurring in the AV. And, Sandy was pretty careful about who she sold what to, so they just let her make some of the decisions. She was, after all, an American Patriot with links to several of the militia groups around the Valley. And, you didn't see too many of those militia members in any of the FEMA Camps, either, come to think of it.

The Three Amigos – Chapter 6 – End of the Blackout

*Mamas, don't let your babies grow up to be cowboys.
Don't let 'em pick guitars or drive them old trucks.
Let 'em be doctors and lawyers and such.
Mamas don't let your babies grow up to be cowboys.
'Cos they'll never stay home and they're always alone.
Even with someone they love.*

Mt. Weather...

"How bad is it out there?" President Kerry asked.

"It pretty much depends upon where you look Mr. President," the Secretary of Homeland Security replied. "New York, for example came out of it pretty good, as did San Francisco. But Los Angeles really took it in the shorts."

"But what is the overall picture here?" Kerry asked.

"Overall, we lost areas of major cities, but it could have been much worse," the Secretary replied. "We lost maybe 15% of the population to the bombs. We did make some mistakes along the way, Mr. President. Those camps seemed like a good idea at the time, but it has turned into a nightmare trying to decide who to let out and who to keep."

"Let them all out and shut down the camps," Kerry announced. "You can use the camps as distribution centers for food and medical treatment, but people aren't going to put up with being detained for very long. Besides, we have bigger problems. I've gotten word that in some of the bigger cities gang activity is at an all-time high. You aren't my only source of information you know."

"What do you intend to do about the gang problems, Mr. President?" the Secretary asked.

"I haven't really decided," Kerry answered. "I could send in the Army, but there are the Posse Comitatus considerations. And, most of the nations of the world are raising hell about their Ambassadors and UN representatives. About the only people who haven't been raising hell have been the British."

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Palmdale, CA, later afternoon, 02Dec05...

"KTPI announced that TV will be back on the air tonight," Clarence reported.

"Well, it's about time," Ron replied, "Maybe we'll start getting some news about what happened for a change."

"I wouldn't count on that too much Ronald," Gary commented, "It depends on who is running the networks and how much information the government is willing to let loose."

"They can't continue the blackout forever," Ron protested, "The people won't stand for it. And, they're going to have to shut down those camps pretty soon or people are going to start rioting."

"If they shut down those camps," Gary observed, "We'll probably get most of the neighbors back. I'm not looking forward to explaining to Dan and Dawn about cutting his darned hedge out."

"He'll probably take one look at the barbed wire and the people toting guns and load his family in that trailer of his and bug out," Chris laughed. "He's all mouth and a little short on being a good neighbor anyway."

"It's a shame that we don't have more barbed wire," Clarence said. "It might not hurt to ring this whole housing tract with concertina."

"There are several fence companies in the Antelope Valley Clarence," Gary observed, "Maybe we could find barbed wire at one of them."

"And how are we going to pay for enough wire and posts to put concertina around this whole housing tract Gar-Bear?" Ron asked.

"It won't take that much wire or that many posts, Ron," Gary suggested, "At least not if we continue the approach we used on my back wall. And, it will give us an extra layer of security."

"How many houses are there in this tract?" Clarence asked.

"When I took Missy for her walk, I counted them," Gary replied. "I guess I always had the number wrong. There are 29 homes on the outside ring and 10 in the center. Some of those houses face out on 2 sides, so I'd guess that we should plan on $29 \times 4 = 116$ or $32 \times 3 = 96$ posts. But, I don't suppose that it would hurt to get a few extra, either."

"What about Sackrete for the posts?" Ron asked.

"I don't believe that we have enough money for 100 bags of Sackrete Ron, but we'll play that by ear," Gary replied. "We can probably tamp that earth enough to support the posts. The holes are only 6" in diameter. And, I don't have any idea how much barbed wire it will take either, so I guess we'd better start with 50 400-yard spools and then buy extra if we need it."

You may recall that a 400-yard spool of barbed wire produced 133 3' loops, or enough concertina for about 66' lineal feet of fence. 50 spools would produce enough concertina

for 3,325 feet of block wall spacing the concertina on 6" centers. Gary had also counted the houses on the north-south streets, 8 and the east – west streets, 9. All of the lots around the periphery appeared to be 65' wide. That meant that the north-south street was about $65 \times 8 = 520 + 125$ or 545 feet long. Better call it 550' feet just to be safe. Now the east west streets were $65 \times 9 = 585 + 125 = 710$ feet. That was probably more like 700' feet. Thus the periphery of the housing tract was about 2,500'. That would take 38 rolls of wire and the two stringers would take another 5,000 feet or 4+ rolls of wire. $38 + 4 = 42$, but the extra wire would allow them to build some extra defenses for the entrance. Gary calculated the actual versus perceived need before they left and decided that 44 rolls would be enough. So, they needed posts and wire and a lot of sweat.

They ended up getting PVC pipes for posts. The barbed wire ran about \$37.50 per 400-yard spool, forcing Ron to add a little extra money to the pot. They also had to forego the Sackrete, but they ended up with the materials they needed and began to erect the concertina, starting at the southwest corner of the tract and working to the north and to the east. In so doing, Dick's back wall was the first to be protected on the north-south western wall and Chris and Patti's house was the second to be protected on the east-west southern wall. And, with more people unrolling the barbed wire and forming the concertina loops, they made a lot of progress that first ½ day. In many ways, Gary's fictional stories had provided them with ideas of how to install the concertina and then they had all of that experience gained fencing in 4560 Moonraker Road.

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My fellow Americans, Kerry began.

I apologize to the American public for not making an announcement sooner. The scope of the attack on this great nation of ours forced us to limit the news during the period immediately following the terrorist attack. As most of you are aware, FEMA set up temporary camps to feed the citizens of this great country. In all honesty, this did not work out as envisioned and effective tomorrow morning everyone will be released from the camps. However the camps will remain open to provide food to our citizenry. They will also provide medical treatment in the event that area hospitals are overcrowded.

The United States faces many challenges in the coming days. Of course the most important of these is the recovery and burial of the approximately 43.5 million people, approximately 15% of this nations' population, who died as a result of the attack and its immediate aftermath. I won't minimize the loss of life that occurred. I did not become aware until 10 hours before the bombs were set to detonate that the terrorists had a contingency plan to explode all of the bombs in their possession. We made such announcements as we thought appropriate in the circumstances. Unfortunately, as feared, some Americans choose to ignore the advice and, as a result, perished. One clear example of this was found in the city of Los Angeles. Rather than protect themselves in community shelters, many Angelinos chose to flee. Unfortunately many of those who made that choice perished. On the other hand those that took our advice survived.

A clear contrast can be seen in the cities of New York and San Francisco where people followed the proffered advice and sought shelter. Most of those people survived. However, because of how the terrorists chose to set the so-called dirty bombs, areas of some communities escaped unscathed. One such area was the area known as South Central in Los Angeles.

Perhaps there is some truth in the old Maxim that the good die young. My fellow Americans, we have a problem. This country has long been beset with problems with urban gangs. This has never been more apparent than the present moment. In many of the large cities, the gangs fared better than the average citizen. These gangs are armed to the hilt with automatic weapons. This might have been different if I had been allowed to pass the Assault Weapons Ban, but the NRA insists it would have changed nothing and this is not the time to resurface that argument.

One choice I have, as your Commander-in-Chief, is to employ the US Army and Marines in an effort to bring the gang violence under control. To the extent that such activity does not fly in the face of the Constitution, I intend to do that very thing. However, be forewarned, if I see a need to temporarily suspend Constitutional guarantees and laws that limit my ability to protect this country, I will not hesitate to do so.

In the interim, citizens are urged to gather together in groups and arm themselves as best they can to protect themselves against these gangs. Yes, America, you heard me correctly, arm yourselves to protect yourselves against these gangs. Despite the best efforts of the Democratic Party to reduce availability of these Assault type weapons, there seems to be a surplus in this country. It's like they told us when I was in the service during the war in Vietnam. Smoke 'em if you got 'em.

In truth, I cannot tell you what to expect in the coming days and weeks. The US military will be called upon to clean up the bodies and to protect our citizens. There simply are not enough members of the armed forces and the National Guard combined to deal with both things effectively. Consequently, until order is fully restored and the cleanup completed, I am extending martial law and the dusk to dawn curfew.

One final matter requires mention. The terrorists exploded 30 stolen suitcase nukes and 182 dirty bombs. The terrorist teams that we caught all consisted of 4 people. We believe it fair to assume that there are about 848 terrorists out there among you. You should not automatically assume that every person of Arab heritage is a terrorist. This country has a diverse heritage and has many citizens of Arab heritage among its population. But, neither does that mean that you should avoid a reasonable amount of skepticism about people of Arabic heritage. My best advice in this matter would be to bring anyone you have suspicions about to the attention of your local authorities and let them handle the situation.

My fellow Americans, we will survive this catastrophe and be all the stronger for it. Washington, DC was the hardest hit of all of the areas with 15 of the 30 nuclear devices being exploded in our nation's capital. As a consequence, it will be necessary for the

branches of your government to continue to operate out of our emergency facility at Mt. Weather.

Thank you and good night.

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“Well fellas,” Ron asked, “What did you think of that speech?”

“It sounded good,” Clarence said.

“That’s true, Clarence,” Gary chimed in, “It sounded good, but then the man has had 3 weeks and the benefit of a gaggle of speech writers to make it sound good. I think I’ll just reserve my opinion until we see how this whole thing shakes out. But, it appears that the news blackout is over so maybe the next time we see Johnny, we can find out more about LA.”

“Well, at least we have an idea who we’re protecting ourselves against,” Ron opined.

“Yeah we do Ron,” Clarence replied, “But there is an inherent danger in this. Most of those gang members are minorities, like blacks and Hispanics. It would be awful easy for this thing to turn into a race war. And, then there’s that entire Arab thing. I’m not so sure I’d have said what the President said. By bringing it up, he as much as pointed a finger at all Arab-Americans.”

“Surely Americans must realize that not all Italians and Sicilians are Mafia and that not all blacks and Hispanics are gangsters,” Gary said, “The same thing applies to Arab-Americans. Hell, my family physician is an Iranian.”

“There’re probably only a few dozen Caucasian doctors in all of LA Gar-Bear,” Ron chuckled. “None of my doctors were born in the US.”

“Well, tomorrow, we’re going to have to put up as much concertina in as possible,” Gary commented. “Regardless of whom the enemy turns out to be.”

03Dec05...

Everyone was up at the crack of dawn installing the concertina. By 10am, the easiest task, installing all of the posts, was completed and everyone took a coffee break. The Three Amigos had volunteered for guard duty that morning because 2 of the 3 were just too short to be of any use. It was for this reason and this reason alone, that Gary happened to have his Super Match rifle out and a magazine in it. Around 10:15am a school bus pulled in and began to disgorge Moon Shadows residents. Included among the Passengers were Dan and Dawn and their two daughters. Dan took one look at the missing hedge and came storming through the gate looking to raise hell. Gary saw him coming and stood and picked up the M1A, holding it at port arms.

“Where in the hell is my hedge?” Dan demanded.

“I can’t say as I can remember what we did with it,” Gary replied, “Maybe we burned it. We capped all of those sprinklers, too.”

“What gave you the right to cut down my hedge?” Dan demanded.

“What gives you the right to be trespassing on my property and what right did your hedge have trespassing on my property?” Gary asked.

“I ought to bust you in the chops,” Dan said.

“Go ahead Dan,” Gary said, jacking a round into the chamber of the M1A.

“Now you’re threatening me with a gun, darn it,” Dan said.

“Dan, I’m on guard duty here and I just remembered that I didn’t have a round chambered,” Gary replied evenly.

“I’m going to call the Sheriff,” Dan said.

“The number is 267-4300 (really),” Gary replied, “Be sure and ask for Deputy Sergeant Johnny Jones, he’s the guy who got us to put in the fence.”

Dan left, but he must have tried to call Gary’s bluff. Not 10-minutes later, a patrol car showed up driven by Johnny and carrying a total of 4 Deputies. Dan came storming out of his house and starting giving Johnny a piece of his mind and pointing a finger toward Gary. Johnny listened to Dan patiently and when Dan finally calmed down, walked over to Gary’s gate, which was still standing open, blocking the sidewalk.

“Los Tres Amigos,” Johnny said and entered the property. “You neighbor seems to think you threatened him with a gun, Gary. What’s your side of it?”

“Well, he was trespassing and I did get up with my rifle,” Gary admitted. “I pointed out that he was trespassing and he threatened to hit me. It was about then that I remembered that I was on guard duty and jacked a round into the chamber. He said I was threatening him with my gun and I explained why I chambered a round. It was a coincidence, although I can see now what he must have thought.”

“Well, no harm, no foul,” Johnny said. He turned to Dan who was standing just outside the gate. “Mister, a man has a right to protect his property. Did he tell you that you were trespassing?”

“Yeah, but,” Dan replied.

“And did you threaten to hit him?” Johnny continued.

“Yeah, but...” Dan replied.

“And did Gary explain why he chambered a round in his M1A?” Johnny asked.

“Yeah, but...” Dan continued to try and object.

“Well, this is just your garden variety neighborhood dispute gotten a little out of hand,” Johnny summarized. “For your information, Mister, I suggested that they build that fence. And if your hedge was on Gary’s property, he had a right to remove that part on his property. I can see those bush stumps from here and it looks to me like you planted those bushes right up against the property line. I’m sure that Gary will replace the bushes after this emergency is over, but in the meantime Mister, I’d suggest that you stay away from Gary or I’m going to have to arrest you for assault.”

“What assault?” Dan demanded, “I never laid a finger on him.”

“That’s battery Mister,” Johnny said, “An assault is an unlawful attempt, coupled with a present ability, to commit a violent injury on the person of another. A battery is any willful and unlawful use of force or violence upon the person of another. Also you made the assault during the process of an unlawful trespass. Now, I’m going to let you off with a warning, but if I have to come back, you’re going to jail.”

Dan stormed off and entered his home. Johnny gave Gary one of those looks that said a mouthful. Since Gary hadn’t pointed the rifle, he’d narrowly avoided arrest himself, in theory. But Johnny used to live in Moon Shadows and he heard all about the ongoing feud between Gary and Dan. And the feud had started when Gary had put in a nicer lawn than Dan’s back in 1988. Dan, or so Johnny had heard, was a drunk and a butthole. Johnny just did what he usually did; settle a neighborhood dispute and avoided bloodshed. However, Johnny had no doubt that had Dan been armed, he’d be lying dead on the ground inside of Gary’s fence.

The coffee break and entertainment was over and everyone except The Three Amigos returned to the task of putting up the concertina. Johnny and the Deputies did notice the concertina going up around the tract when they’d arrived at Moon Shadows and approved of the steps the men were taking to protect their neighbors. About ½ hour later Dan began to load things into his camping trailer. The trailer, a Tahoe Lite 5th wheeler was pulled by an extended cab pickup. When they had everything loaded, Dan and Dawn and the 2 girls took off, bugged out, just as Chris had predicted. Of course Dan had the final word, giving Gary the bird as he drove by. Gary just smiled, at least he was leaving. That truck and trailer would make a nice mobile command post for some gangsters.

“Chance favors the prepared mind. Assumption is the mother of all frick ups!” Remember that movie? Maybe that movie and a couple dozen others explained, in part, why

Gary wanted to be prepared; or, maybe not. Be that as it may, by the end of the day, they had the concertina completed to the front and part way across. They had also reached the eastern end of the south wall and had turned north. One more day would see the concertina installed. And, in one more day, they would be able to poll the residents of the housing tract and see how many of them were willing to get involved in defending the place. If nobody was, they could get some more wire and posts and wire in Chris and Patti's house and Dick's house. If they were, there was some assessing to be done and some assignments to be worked out. (From Under Siege 2, spoken by Travis Dane; the first remark was originally made by Louis Pasteur. *In the fields of observation chance favors only the prepared mind.*)

04Dec05...

There were many pairs of extra hands helping this Monday morning. There was a shortage of leather gloves, but the people were: 1) glad to be home; and 2) concerned about security having seen the President's address while in the FEMA Camp. Several people were helping with the concertina, gloves or not. That took care of the first question, whether or not anyone would be willing to get involved. On the other hand, there was quite a difference between helping to put in a little barbed wire and standing guard at the front entrance of the housing tract with a firearm. And, they couldn't put just anyone on that front gate either. Individual firearms skills had to be assessed with temperament. Someone who was a hothead, like Dan for example, wouldn't do to be in the front line of defense.

FEMA had given the people enough food for a few days; it was all most of them could carry. They had also handed out a schedule of when people could pick their next rations up. It was one of those alphabetical schedules that divided the alphabet into 7 divisions. A, B, and C on Sunday, etc. That was how it would be for a while, too. Once a week, you would be issued so many calories of food according to the number of persons in your family. It was as fair as a system could be, but it didn't really take into account personal preferences. Those were resolved by means of a system of barter that quickly sprung up. This was survival 101 and you know what? Chance did favor the prepared mind.

"I don't know just what in the hell you expected a survival situation to be like Ronald," Gary said, "But it's only a little different from everyday life, if you are prepared."

"I don't seem to recall walking around with a gun strapped on and carrying a rifle besides," Ron observed.

"Maybe not, partner, but there were a lot of times that your mental state wasn't any different than it is right now," Gary claimed. "Think about it. Always looking over your shoulder wondering when the other shoe was about to drop. Hoping, one more time that your kid wouldn't get in trouble; one eye open on the freeway, watching out for a CHP officer sneaking down some off ramp to bust you for something."

“You must have lived in a different part of California than I did,” Ron chuckled, “Of course I never had a heavy foot like some people I know. I can relate to the kid thing, but with both of my two troublemakers in prison or headed for prison, I don’t have to worry about them for a while.”

“Nope. It’s just a different set of worries, partner,” Gary insisted. “Now we’re worried about when will the gangsters from LA show up in greater numbers and better armed than we are. And, will the ATF or the state of California get wise to those suppressors and bust us? And, how long will the gas stay on? It’s just a different way of looking at the same problems we’ve always had.”

“Well, I guess I’ve led a sheltered life,” Ron admitted, “I never had a carload of armed gangsters show up at my front door in the middle of the night looking to rip my place off because my daughter got to running with the gangs for a while.”

“I never have either, Ron,” Gary said, “That happened to Sharon while I was out making a fool with myself with the bimbos.”

“I tried to tell you about her, but you just wouldn’t listen,” Ron said for the 1,000th time.

“Let’s not get off into that again,” Gary said. “But it was a good experience in a way, it just taught me a different set of survival skills.”

“We may be getting old partner,” Ron said, “But don’t kid yourself, life is a constant learning experience. When you stop learning, you might as well hang it up.”

“So true,” Gary agreed. “Say, tell me something. Why did we buy expensive match grade ammo for our M1A’s? None of us has good enough vision or is steady enough to need to use match ammo.”

“We might not be the one using the M1A’s,” Ron suggested. “We may just end up using our Winchesters. They are lighter and a lot easier to handle. And, since you have to work the lever between each shot, it has been my experience that we tend to aim our shots better. A guy can rip through 20 rounds with that M1A in about ½ the time that you can get off the dozen in the Winchester. I’m just happy that we don’t use any of those M16’s. Even in 3 round burst, you can burn off a mag in nothing flat.”

“How would you know something like that?” Gary asked.

“I didn’t say that we didn’t have any M16’s, only that we didn’t use M16’s,” Ron replied.

“But Ron, you sold Sandy your 5.56 ammo,” Gary protested. “If you really have an M16, why would you do something like that?”

“I didn’t say that I had a M16,” Ron replied.

“No, you didn’t, partner, but you implied as much,” Gary retorted. “Do you have a M16?”

“Hm, ‘do I have a M16’,” Ron repeated Gary’s exact question. “I’d have to say no, Gar-Bear, I do not have a M16.”

“Then why do I get the impression that you do have a M16 and that you’re mincing words with me?” Gary asked. “But you never brought a M16 over here and you never brought the subject up before. Ergo, I think you’re just playing with me as usual.”

“Let me ask you this Gar-Bear,” Ron continued, “If I had an M16 would you use it?”

“Probably not,” Gary admitted, “I wouldn’t want to use any weapon at night unless it had a suppressor to conceal the muzzle flash.”

“Do you mean like that M4-FA suppressor that Surefire makes?” Ron asked.

“Exactly partner,” Gary said, “From everything I’ve read about that unit, it’s perfect. It reduces the sound about 30dBs, it increases the muzzle velocity about 50fps and it lasts forever.”

“And if the rifle or carbine were fitted with a Surefire M4-FA,” Ron pressed, “What model of rifle would you prefer?”

“Well, I expect that the perfect rifle would be one that shot semi-automatic, 3-round burst and full auto,” Gary replied.

“I suppose you would,” Ron said, “But the only weapon I know of with a trigger group like that is the H&K MP5. What would your second choice be?”

“Since we’re just speculating here,” Gary said, “Probably the A2 model with the 3-round burst.”

“Um hum,” Ron replied. “What about the A4 model in 3 round burst?”

“I can’t see that there’s much difference,” Gary said, “A2 or A4, either one.”

“So what you’re telling me is that if you had access to a M16A3 or A4 with a Surefire M4-FA suppressor, a bunch of mags and enough ammo, you wouldn’t turn it down, right?” Ron summarized.

“Probably not Ron,” Gary admitted, “Hypothetically. But I do like my cowboy guns”

The Three Amigos – Chapter 7 – Desperados

*Desperado, why don't you come to your senses?
You been out ridin' fences for so long now.
Oh, you're a hard one, I know that you got your reasons,
these things that are pleasin' you can hurt you somehow.
Don't you draw the queen of diamonds, boy,
she'll beat you if she's able,
you know the queen of hearts is always your best bet.
Now it seems to me some fine things
have been laid upon your table,
but you only want the ones that you can't get.*

05Dec05...

Bright and early the next morning, Ron and John left to 'pick something up' from Ron's house. They weren't gone long and when they got back, Gary didn't see them take anything out of the car. The car did, however, seem to be riding a bit low. Gary assumed it was just his imagination and he walked down to Chris and Patti's to visit with Chris. Ron and John took advantage of Gary's absence to move the contents of the back seat and the trunk into the shelter. Gary wanted to talk to Chris about the next step, assessing the willingness of the residents to participate in protecting the housing tract. And, to the extent that anyone was willing to participate, what their individual skill levels were and what sort of temperament they had. Not surprisingly, Chris said that this was a job for Patti and Darlene, Johnny's ex-wife.

Gary knew about Darlene and what a busybody she was. He'd even used her as a character in a couple of his novels that he'd based right here in Moon Shadows. Darlene was definitely a type A personality and she also knew everyone's business. But, Patti wasn't far behind Darlene in that department. Between the two of them, they knew absolutely everyone's business. But it was Darlene, more than Patti, who had met most of the people. Gary wasn't quite sure how Johnny would take to getting Darlene involved in the running of the security of the housing tract. He was therefore a little reluctant to get Darlene involved. But then, Chris had insisted that it 'was a job for the girls' and Gary ended up without much choice in the matter. He went home and got Sharon to arbitrate any problems that might come up when he discussed the matter with Patti and Darlene.

Because of their close relationship, Sharon was frequently at Patti's and knew Darlene a lot better than Gary did. Gary explained to Sharon what he needed to know for the moment and asked Sharon to talk to Patti and Darlene. He'd come along, but only to answer any questions they might have. He wasn't about to open his mouth in front of Darlene and have the whole neighborhood knowing his business by the next day, he claimed. Actually, Sharon figured that Darlene just intimidated Gary like all women with type A personalities did, but she kept her peace and didn't bring up a sore subject. They returned to Chris and Patti's and Sharon explained to Patti what Gary needed to know.

“Well, we will have to get Darlene involved in any discussion of this sort,” Patti said. “Come on guys and don’t let her intimidate you Gary.”

“She doesn’t intimidate me one bit, Patti,” Gary insisted.

“Yeah right,” Patti laughed. They walked up to Darlene’s house, the second house from the corner on Northstar on the periphery of the tract. Darlene invited them in and Patti and Sharon explained to Darlene what Gary needed to know.

“Why didn’t you just ask me yourself Gary?” Darlene asked. “Is it because women with a type A personality intimidate you?”

“I’m not intimidated,” Gary mumbled barely loud enough to be heard.

“Patti and I can poll the neighbor’s and see who is interested,” Darlene suggested. “But more than that, we’ll assess their personalities and who would be fit to guard the front gate. Of course you will want to know who has what for firearms, too, unless I miss my guess. I was married to a Deputy Sheriff for all those years.”

“That’s exactly what we need to know Darlene,” Gary admitted. “And it might not hurt to find out how much ammunition they have for their firearms.”

“Give us a day or two and we’ll know everything about them except their shorts size,” Darlene said.

“And probably that too,” Gary thought to himself.

With that out of the way, they returned home and Gary went looking for Ron. He found him in the shelter stacking the last case of 5.56 ammo into the corner next to the propane tank.

“What’s with all of the 5.56 ammo, partner?” Gary asked.

“I told you I didn’t sell all of my 5.56 ammo to Sandy,” Ron replied. “John and I went over to the house and picked up the other 15 cases. I figured that some of the folks might have 5.56 caliber rifles and that we ought to have it on hand in case they needed any.”

“That’s a likely story Ronald,” Gary said. “Ok, where are the M16A3’s?”

“What M16A3’s?” Ron asked.

“The hypothetical M16A3’s we were talking about last night,” Gary said.

“I told you that I didn’t have an M16A3,” Ron replied.

“Yeah? Why then why do you have 15 cases of 5.56 ammo?” Gary asked.

“Does ‘just in case’ work for you partner?” Ron asked.

“I suppose,” Gary said.

“Well then I have 15 cases of 5.56 ammo just in case it’s needed,” Ron explained.

Gary stood there looking at those 15 cases of 5.56 ammo. He knew Ron pretty well after 12 years and a moment later, he gave a brief nod of his head and dropped the subject. He had figured it out, have you? With that mystery solved, Gary was free for the remainder of the day. He volunteered for guard duty just to have something to do. Only this time, he didn’t bother with the M1A, it was too heavy to lug around all afternoon and he had the roving patrol. The rover walked the circuit around the tract, keeping an eye on the concertina. Gary’s feet really weren’t up to the task, so he walked slowly, half memorizing the layout of each lot. He walked so slowly that he only covered 4 blocks in 20 minutes. But with each passing lap, Gary became more familiar with the housing tract. Usually when he walked Missy, they walked on the inside around the 10 homes in the center. However, Gary really wanted a feel for the place and began to memorize where all of the gates were and the obstructions on each lot. By the time his 4-hour tour of duty was up, Gary’s feet were on fire, but the 12 trips around the tract had had given him information for future use.

They definitely need some golf carts or something for The Three Amigos to do roving guard patrol. But when Darlene and Patti disclosed how many of the residents were interested in participating, Gary forgot all about the golf carts; at least, for the time being. Every home in the tract was willing to provide at least one person for guard duty. Of those, Darlene said that everyone was fit to be a guard, but that some would be better as a rover. Patti fully agreed with Darlene. When they got to the question of armaments, it was an entirely different story. Some people didn’t have a firearm at all. Others had a shotgun, usually a 20-gauge or a 12-gauge and a .22 rifle. Only a few had .30 caliber center fire rifles and most of those were .30-06. In a pinch, the .30-06 rifles would be okay, the caliber was fit enough, but only a single rifle was a semi-auto and the remainder were bolt-actions. There is nothing wrong with a bolt-action rifle; the military had used them for a very long time. But a military bolt-action is usually intended to be reloaded with a stripper clip, greatly reducing the reloading time. At least, that was what Gary knew of firearms. He was no expert on the various military rifles throughout history, and stood to be corrected if he were wrong.

Nevertheless, Gary wanted semi-auto rifles for the residents of the housing tract, preferably something that was fed with a box magazine. Any of the several AK models would be suitable if he could get them. Unfortunately, this was California. It was time to have a talk with Sandy. Sandy told Gary that the Romanian AKM, Hi-Cap Rifle with Original Hardwood Pistol Grip Stock, 1 30-Rd and 1 40-Rd Mag, Sling, Cleaning Kit, Manual Etc. were available for \$265. Additional 30-round mags were available for \$8 a

pop. Now, the rifles were illegal in California and so were the mags. 10-round stripper clips were \$20 a hundred and ammo was \$75 per 1,000-rounds. She would have to pick up the firearms herself with her FFL license. If they'd cover her expenses, she would make the deal AT HER COST. (above) What did Gar-Bear want to do? 40 rifles and, 200k rounds of ammo, plus 800 mags and 800 stripper clips, he told her and he'd get the money and payment was guaranteed.

$265 \times 40 = 10,600$; $200 \times 75 = 15,000$; $9 \times 800 = 6400$; $20 \times 8 = 160$. The grand total was \$32,160 \div 40 equals \$804 for each rifle with 21 30-round mags, 1 40-round mag, 20 stripper clips and 5,000 rounds of ammo was \$804. That was a lot of money, she told him, was he certain he could raise the cash? He told her he would get back to her and not to go ahead unless he had cash-in-hand. \$32,160? It might as well be \$1 million. As it was, they had pretty much gone through all of their cash just doing what they had done. Maybe they had \$3,200 among them. But, they didn't need any firearms; they were set. Well, the only thing to do was to see how many of the volunteers could come up with \$804 apiece. It probably wouldn't be many. Gary walked down to Patti's and filled her in. \$800 wasn't a lot, considering what they would be getting for their money, but on the other hand \$800 was a lot of money for anyone to come up with period. Patti pointed out that they had used about \$100 per house, maybe more, maybe less putting in the concertina. She was way high, but Gary didn't want to interrupt. And, she went on that the people should be expected to contribute to their common defense.

Gary told Patti that contributing to the common defense was why they paid taxes. That was then and this was now, she retorted. Leave it to Darlene and her, she said. They'd talk to the people and see how many guns they could sell at \$804 a pop. Gary was more than willing to do that. Darlene and Patti would probably do a little good guy-bad guy and end up laying a guilt trip on the people until they were begging to buy a rifle. But, no matter what Darlene and Patti did, what were the odds that the 40 families could come up with \$800 apiece for a rifle, accessories and ammo? The ammo amounted to about half the total, he reminded himself. And that was \$375 of the \$800. He went back to Patti's and pointed out that the actual rifle itself with the magazines was \$429 plus the delivery cost, maybe another \$21 per rifle. That cut the total to \$450 a rifle. People could look at it that way, he said, and only buy as much ammo as they could afford.

With free time on their hands The Three Amigos really had time to discuss that speech they'd watched on TV the other night.

"It was a nice speech," Clarence repeated.

"And like I said Clarence, he had a gaggle of speech writers and 3 weeks to prepare that speech," Gary insisted. "Look, take his opening; he was all apologetic and admitting the administration had screwed up. I agree with what he said, but I don't ever remember him being so honest during the campaign."

"Yeah," Ron said, "He sounded more like Bush than Kerry, and even Bush wasn't that open and honest."

“Well, he did warn the population 10 hours in advance,” Clarence pointed out.

“He did do that,” Ron said with Gary nodding in agreement.

“And he passed the buck on who was responsible for 43+ million American dying,” Gary pointed out. “I don’t dispute what he said, BUT how in the name of Heaven did a bunch of terrorists get that many bombs into the country? And they were all nukes or conventional bombs with radioactive materials added. They had to import all of those radioactive materials!”

“Funny he didn’t mention the bombers they did catch, Clarence admitted.

“And that appeal to the American public to band together, didn’t particularly ring true either,” Gary said. “He did take his shot at Assault Weapons, but why is it up to the Army, Marines and Guard to clean up the mess? There are plenty of civilians who would be more than willing to pitch in and help.”

“He didn’t miss the chance to bring up his war record either,” Ron added. “That ‘smoke ‘em if you got ‘em’ comment was a not so funny double entendre, if I ever heard one.”

“I said that I was going to reserve judgment on that speech,” Gary reminded them, “And I see no reason to change my position. We could pick it apart one word at a time and not know more than we know now. I guess 2 things bothered me. First, he will withhold action and protect the laws and the Constitution. I don’t believe that for a moment. He probably has a whole pile of Executive Orders to spring on us. Second, the tone of that speech was definitely un-Kerry like. I didn’t like him as a candidate, I didn’t vote for him and I still don’t like him. I simply don’t trust the man.”

“Why’s that Gary?” Clarence asked.

“Let’s just say that he a liberal Democrat from Massachusetts married to a billionaire and pals with Teddy Kennedy and leave it at that,” Gary replied. “Those 5 reasons are enough.”

“Five?” Ron repeated.

“Five,” Gary explained. “Liberal-Democrat-Massachusetts-Billionaire-Kennedy.”

“He does try to have his cake and eat it too,” Ron said, “Voted for the war in Iraq, but against funding it.”

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06Dec05...

It had been a quiet night. A patrol car had passed the tract about once an hour, but there hadn't been any other traffic. Apparently everyone was adhering to the extended curfew. They'd borrowed a couple of construction barriers to block the entrance, too. It wouldn't stop anyone, but they were still working on a more intimidating barrier for the entrance. It would be finished up today and installed. Chris and Matt had gone out and scrounged up some scrap steel pipes somewhere and he'd ended up moving his welder down to Gary and Sharon's. The welder had just about overloaded the generator, but Chris had put together quite the gate. It was constructed from 6" pipe and consisted of 4 sections. They had used the posthole auger to dig 2 holes at the edges of the street and 2 more in the center. The hardest part had been getting through the concrete road, but Chris pulled his pickup up fired up his 5kw generator and they used the ½" drill and masonry bits to drill a 6" circle and then chipped out the concrete.

The four support posts needed help getting to the bottom of the holes, so snug was the fit. But, Dick had a sledgehammer and eventually they were all driven to the bottom of the 32" deep holes. Several men lugged the massive gates to the entrance and they hung them one at a time. To make sure they would swing, Chris had attached a small wheel at the opposite end from the hinged side. They got the first two in blocking the incoming lane and then dropped the cross beams in place. Now, that was one solid gate. They then hung the two gates on the outgoing lane and dropped the cross beams in place. That gate might not stop a tank, but your average car couldn't get through it. With that accomplished, they put in some more of the poles and blocked the small area between the gates and the block wall with barbed wire and concertina. Moon Shadows was declared to be secure.

Darlene and Patti had finished their crusade trying to browbeat everyone into buying at least one Assault rifle per household. They had orders for 37 rifles and 45 cases of ammo. One family had deep pockets, apparently, and had offered to help out the neighbors who were a little short on cash. And that same family had ordered 2 of the rifles and 10 cases of ammo. Everyone else had been hard pressed to come up with the price of 1 rifle and one case of ammo. This was actually pretty good news and far better than Gary had expected. Darlene had missed her calling; she should have been a used car salesperson. Gary called Sandy and gave her the good news. 37 rifles, fully equipped plus 45 cases of ammo and he had the cash in hand.

Sandy informed Gary of several things in return. She'd been thinking about it and had decided to buy 100 of the rifles, a couple thousand magazines and ½ million rounds of ammo. She would have more rifles in the future if they needed them, but with a 20% markup. Gary expressed a concern over security and Sandy informed him that she was going to be accompanied by 2 off-duty Deputies and would be escorted all the way to the Nevada state line by the Sheriff's Department and CHP and the Nevada Highway Patrol would take over from there. "Yeah right," Gary thought, "The LA Country Sheriff, CHP and the Nevada Patrol is going to provide security while you break a bunch of state and federal laws."

A lone semi left Palmdale bound for Nevada. Inside the cab were the driver, 2 off-duty

Deputies and Sandy with a briefcase full of cash. The vehicle was escorted to the LA County line by 2 patrol cars and the CHP picked up the escort from there. There was no traffic on I-15 and that empty rig made near record time to the Nevada state line. The Nevada HP provided a 2-car escort to Vegas where the truck stopped at an out of the way warehouse. The driver backed the truck up to the loading dock and a forklift transferred pallet after pallet of merchandise to the truck. Sandy entered into the warehouse carrying the briefcase and returned empty handed except for a handful of paperwork. Elapsed time, under one hour. The semi pointed itself south and the Nevada HP escorted it to the border where it was met by the same 2 CHP cars and escorted to Victorville and west on state route 18. At the LA County line, two Sheriff's patrol cars picked up the escort and took the truck into Palmdale. The 14-hour trip had broken enough laws to put everyone in jail for a very long time. The contents of the truck were unloaded into an empty facility in the same complex where the Palmdale Group held its meetings. And Johnny posted a patrol car to keep an eye on the building.

07Dec05...

On the 64th anniversary of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, the phone rang early at the Olsen household.

"This is Sandy," Sandy said, "Come pick it up. It's the building in the row behind the Palmdale Group with the Deputy sitting out front."

\$20,025 and an hour later, the security at Moon Shadows was greatly improved. Everyone had his or her rifle and was busy loading the 7.62x39mm ammo into stripper clips and magazines. Each rifle came with a manual and the folks took the time to get familiar with their new toys. Sandy, by the way, had mentioned that she also had a large assortment of 20" shotgun barrels and magazine extensions. Shotgun ammo was definitely not a problem, especially the 12-pellet 00 12-gauge buck shot and slugs. She only had a few cases of 20-gauge, but she could shorten the barrels on those shotguns, crown them and cold blue the ends. And, she said, if money were a problem, she would shorten the barrels on the 20-gauges for \$25 a pop.

So far, FEMA had been true to Kerry's word and was handing out food, no charge, and providing medical assistance when requested. But at Moon Shadows certain elderly gentlemen were waiting for the other shoe to drop. They didn't have long to wait.

My fellow Americans, President addressed the nation on TV and radio.

Unfortunately the scope of the damage to our beloved country is far worse than initially anticipated. As a consequence, I am requiring each family to contribute one hour of labor assisting in the cleanup of the affected cities per 1,800 calories of food issued by FEMA. Martial law will remain in effect for the foreseeable future. I also found it necessary to issue an Executive Order suspending Posse Comitatus, Habeas Corpus and the 4th Amendment. I assure you that these measures will be temporary and the Executive Order rescinded as soon as this emergency is over.

Thank you and good night.

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“Now that’s more like the John Kerry I didn’t vote for,” Gary announced.

“I thought that Habeas Corpus was part of the 4th Amendment,” Clarence said, “Why did he single it out?”

“Clarence, Habeas Corpus is part of Article II of the Constitution,” Gary explained. “The 4th amendment is the search warrant article in the Bill of Rights. Posse Comitatus is a separate law entirely. The government can now use troops just like police, bust into your home and search it without a warrant, and throw you in the slammer without the benefit of being arraigned or the right to a quick and speedy trial. It’s the USA Patriot Act expanded 10-fold, and applied to everyone.”

“They are getting all of the energy they’re giving the people in food back, too,” Ron observed. “A man with a wife and 2 kids will be working a lot of hours paying for the food for his family.”

“I think the point here is that it didn’t take Kerry very long to change the rules, fellas,” Gary said. “I wonder what other rule changes he has up his sleeve?”

“I wonder when they are going to get around to restoring power.” Clarence remarked. “We got gas and water, but most furnaces don’t do you any good without electricity.”

“That’s a good question Clarence,” Gary said, “I guess since we have generator power, it hadn’t crossed my mind.”

“Chris and Patti are getting by because of that little generator in his truck,” Ron pointed out, “And I noticed that Dick has an extension cord running from the generator on his travel trailer. But you kind of have to wonder how much firewood people have for their fireplaces and how much propane they have for their gas grills.”

“Some of those gas grills are probably hooked up to natural gas, Ron,” Gary replied, “And we can refill the propane bottles for a while. We are setup to do that, aren’t we Ron?”

“Yep. I made sure of that when they put in the 2,200-gallon tank,” Ron explained. “The tank has a wet leg.”

“Everyone had trouble coming up with the money for those Assault rifles,” Gary observed, “So I doubt that they have money to go buy a portable generator. And running on natural gas, our generator only puts out 10.5kw, so we don’t really have much power to spare.”

"Maybe we need to ask Johnny about the lights," Ron suggested."

"I agree partner, not having street lights just makes security all that much harder," Gary commented. "On the other hand, we need to tap into the street light electrical feed and put a switch in it to cut the lights in the tract in case of a night attack."

"We'd better do that tomorrow before the power comes back on," Ron suggested.

"Good idea Ron," Gary replied. "Well, my pills are kicking in so I think that I'll call it a night."

08Dec05...

With 39 houses in the tract, but extra people, they had worked out a guard schedule that required 4-hour shifts, 24/7. 4 people were in the front entrance at all times and 2 persons were rovers. People were expected to pull 5 shifts of guard duty a week. $7 \times 6 = 42$ 4-hour shifts per week $\times 6$ persons per shift = 1,008 man-hours of guard duty per week, divided by 20 hours per person = 50.4 people. With Ron, Clarence and Gary plus David and his 4 boys and John plus Chris and Matt, the Olsen and People's households were supplying the missing manpower. They were providing 11 people. The remaining households were only required to come up with 39 people out of 37 households.

They took the shotguns to Sandy and asked her to cut, crown and blue the ends of the barrels. With a mag extension, each refit ran about \$40. She told them she'd need 3 days to complete the work. Remember the fella around the corner on Moon Dance Drive with the deep pockets? His pockets were actually pretty deep and he was a good guy. He had 2 bolt-action .30-06's, 12-gauge and 20-gauge Remington 870 Express Combos and 8 shot magazine extension for both of his shotguns. Both he and his wife were shooters and they didn't have any kids, perhaps explaining why they had some money. He offered to pay for getting everyone's shotgun worked over and for 20 more cases of the 7.62x39mm Russian ammo. He even offered to buy 5 cases each of 00 buck and slugs. Now, the man's wife was an absolute beauty queen and maybe that explained why he was so generous. Maybe he was putting out the extra money to make sure that no one laid a hand on his wife. Or, maybe he was just the generous sort. In California?

To understand the layout of Moon Shadows Phase VI, as the tract was actually named, one could envision an almost square block of land. Stardust Place was the entrance street extending about 75 feet north of Northstar Drive to Avenue R. If you traveled south on Stardust, you were forced to turn left on Moonraker Road. Moonraker Road extended to the east right up to the block wall, but before the end of the street, you encountered Moon Dance Drive, another left turn. Travel north on Moon Dance and you came to Northstar Drive and when you turned left on Northstar drive, you ended back up at Stardust place. There were 29 homes on the periphery and 10 in the center.

Those homes in the center had huge, deep lots, too.

The next night, the roving guard duty would fall to Ron, Gary and Clarence. None of The Three Amigos were quite up to making the circuit and that night, after curfew, they drove over to the golf course at 40th Street East and Avenue P. They borrowed Chris's truck and car trailer. The gentlemen helped themselves to 3 dang nice looking golf carts. The 1999 Club Car 2 passenger golf carts were in excellent condition and had an all-aluminum frame, forest green body and beige upholstery. They also had good 48 Volt batteries (6 8-volt Trojans) heavy-duty crosshatched tires, and beautiful bronze wheel covers. They came complete with a 48-volt charger and 3.1 HP GE motor, hard vinyl beige top, and clear split hinged windshield. The Three Amigos had the entire next day to fix those golf carts up to suit themselves too.

09Dec05...

They had a terrible time finding scabbards for their weapons. Eventually, however, they tracked down 6 of them. Chris gave them a hand and affixed some small brackets to the golf carts, a pair on each side, and they mounted the scabbards. The Winchester went in the scabbard on the left side of the vehicle, the shotgun went in the scabbard on the right side of the vehicle and the M1A's went on their laps. The Three Amigos were ready to ride! And, between those suppressors and the stolen golf carts, our friends were now properly classified as desperados.

But, they left a note saying that they were only borrowing the golf carts and would return them when they had finished with them. They'd signed the note 'Manny, Moe and Jack', an idea Gary had gotten from one of his earlier stories. Yep, it was time to *Ride, Sally, Ride*. [Lou Reed, from his album, *Sally Can't Dance*.] Gary hadn't even known that it had been the Eagles who had recorded *Desperado*, but then bimbo #1 had given him the *Eagles Greatest Hits, Volume 2* and he'd had to go find *Volume 1* and had even ended up with the video of theirs, 'Hell Freezes Over'.

Yeah, Hell would freeze over before old Gar-Bear went chasing bimbos again. Bimbos were a thing of the past. Gary wondered how bimbo #2 and her new boyfriend had made out living down there in the San Fernando Valley. But, that thought didn't last too long. Marie had a nice bod, but like so many things the contents weren't nearly as nice as the package. Gary had told the truth when he'd said that the bimbos had taught him a lesson or two in survival. A painful lesson to be sure, the grass on the other side of the fence was greener, but it was filled with rocks and broken glass and barbed wire and the occasional snake. Listen up folks; this lesson is thrown in at no extra charge. Those snakes have big fangs, too.

The Three Amigos – Chapter 8 – Blowing in the Wind

*How many roads must a man walk down, before they call him a man
How many seas must a white dove sail, before she sleeps in the sand
How many times must the cannonballs fly, before they are forever banned
The answer, my friend, is blowing in the wind
The answer is blowing in the wind*

It was a real shame that those extremists didn't listen to Bob Dylan. They had made a real mess out of the country and now the government seemed to just be making things worse. If you believed the President, these were just temporary measures. But if you were a skeptic, you had already written a lot of your freedoms off. If you were to ask The Three Amigos, they would simply tell you that those freedoms would end up being restored. But there was a tone in their voices that added, 'one way or another'. The 3 guys rode around in their 'new' golf carts for part of the day and then set them to re-charge. Those carts needed to see them through a 4-hour shift. Ron had the 8pm-midnight shift, Clarence the midnight to 4am shift and Gary the 4am to 8am shift. And so far as TV went, it was mostly just reruns from the networks' archives with very little news. They did not, for example, have a very clear picture of what was brewing in LA.

The cleanup parties were transported to LA via a vast assortment of busses. They had started at the 14-5 junction and loaded the bodies onto trucks and they were taken and unceremoniously dumped into mass graves. The vehicles would run and once they cleared the accident that has caused the backup, the vehicles were driven up I-5 to Santa Clarita and parked in parking lots or other available space. That had started on 10Dec05.

Every day thereafter, 7 days a week, the armada of busses made its way to the SF Valley and eventually, I-5 began to open up. They had cleared from the 5-14 junction down to the 5-405 junction and stopped. They now had access to the Valley and every day, more and more bodies went into the trucks and from there to the mass graves. Since The Three Amigos and their family members didn't partake of the FEMA offered food, they didn't need to worry about working on the cleanup detail. It was a gruesome business, or so they heard from the residents who were working on the details. The feds provided them with rubber kitchen gloves, N-95 mask and a tarp. The bodies were rolled on the tarp, hauled to the trucks and dumped and then the cycle repeated itself. And with the moderate weather in LA, every day the stench grew a little worse. Most of the people learned to carry a jar of Vicks, which when liberally applied, at least it reduced the smell a little.

The government had been trying to keep good records of who worked and who didn't, but they fell behind in their record keeping. The week before Christmas, they finally got caught up and realized that the people in the Palmdale area had put in enough time to cover their rations until late January. They still hadn't had any interaction with the gangs from LA and many began to wonder if there really was a threat. But at Moon Shadows, the guards were maintained and people began to turn their thoughts to Christmas. This

would be a Christmas unlike any other in memory. There wasn't any money to buy presents and if it weren't for the government food dole and dole of prescription drugs, no one would have had anything. So, things reverted to a century or two earlier and people made gifts for each other out of materials at hand.

Sharon had enough yarn stored in the garage for a half dozen or more projects and yards and yards of cloth dating back to her stitch and sew days. She freely passed these things out because it was obvious that she would never live long enough to benefit from their presence. That sure did clear up room in the garage. And, there were all of those boxes of books, many of them new and never having been read. These went to the fellas to give to their wives. Everybody started going through the stuff they had stored and although a lot of the Christmas presents were used, there were things that people always thought they wanted. Then the miracle came; the day before Christmas the power was finally restored.

They hadn't realized what was going on for a moment or two. The power came on just before dusk and the furnaces kicked in. Since the attack back on the 12th of November had come during daylight hours, most people had their lights turned off and had never bothered to turn them on. But, when the streetlights began kicking on and people finally figured out that the furnaces were working, the entire neighborhood began to light up. At a hastily called meeting at Chris and Patti's it was decided to leave the streetlights on, too.

The folks there at Moon Shadows didn't have those neighborhood meetings like one might have expected. Darlene and Patti had become the sort of unofficial group liaisons and passed along ideas to the 4 residents most responsible for keeping the tract going, Dick, Chris, Gary and Randy Hunt (Deep pockets). Although Ron and Clarence were living there and were equally responsible, it was one vote per home so most of Gary votes were a consensus of The Three Amigos. However, Ron and Clarence did attend the meetings of the four residents and they were vocal in their opinions, probably influencing the votes of the others. But, I'm straying from the subject of Christmas.

This year was going to be very special and Ron knew it but didn't realize that Gary knew it too. If Gary had any doubts, the minor modifications Chris made to the golf carts eliminated them. Several stations were able to get a live feed from Rome and had the Midnight Mass ceremony from St. Peter's Basilica. Other stations ran reruns of prior year's Christmas shows. They had a nice dinner and crowded around the TV's in the shelter and in the Living Room. They had even put up the tree and hung lights because they had power from the generator and later from Edison. As was tradition in the Olsen household, Christmas gifts weren't to be passed out until the following morning. This was one of the two days a year that Sharon made her special breads, Monkey Bread and Pecan Rolls. Both were baked in a Bundt pan and the Monkey bread was tube biscuits cut in half and rolled in a cinnamon sugar mixture with a liberal application of a Karo, butter and brown sugar syrup and walnut pieces. The Pecan rolls were made out of the frozen bread rolls dumped in the pan, sprinkled with a regular butterscotch pudding powder and topped by a butter and brown sugar mixture and pecans. Both were good,

but Gary preferred the Monkey Bread. Sharon preferred to make the Pecan Rolls because they were quicker and easier.

Of course the children were still of an age where Christmas was a big deal. A quiet exchange had gone on among the parents trading the prior year's good used toys. Fortunately nobody with children had put Christmas shopping off to the last minute so there were a lot of new things for the kids. The adults received a lot of homemade presents, but in most cases, the homemade and the bargained for trades were more pleasing than the stuff usually purchased in a rush from some store. More thought had obviously gone into the gifts this Christmas. All of the presents had been passed out and Gary had to confess that he was a bit disappointed. He had expected a gift from Ronald McDonald, but nothing had materialized. He concealed his disappointment and they put on a movie to watch. Gary needed a little cheering up and he selected one of his favorites, *In Harm's Way*. The 165 minute black and white movie had been released in 1965. Included in the characters was a very much grown up Jill Haworth, who made her first movie appearance in *Exodus* in 1960 at age 15. She was something to behold at age 20 in this John Wayne epic. That had been her last major movie.

When the movie was over, dinner was served. There was turkey this year only because Sharon had bought two in late October or early November in planning for Thanksgiving and Christmas. Considering that they were living on 'survival' rations, it was quite the feast. A couple of items normally found on the table at Thanksgiving and Christmas were missing, but either no one noticed or everyone was just being polite. The kitchen table expanded to 8' and they brought up the 8' folding table from the shelter to seat everyone. There was even pumpkin pie for desert and cool whip from the freezer. When everyone had eaten their fill, Ron made some remark about an extra desert and he and John got up and went to the shelter. They returned carrying rifle boxes and a large paper bags filled with what turned out to be 30-round magazines. Clarence and Gary each received a box and Ron sat back down and opened his. Each box contained a M16A3 with a Surefire M4-FA suppressor. The paper bag contained 18 of the high quality USGI, Teflon coated 30-round magazines packed 3 per magazine pouch for each rifle.

Even though Gary had figured it out much earlier, he was still in awe of the weapon. He checked and the suppressor went on and off just like Surefire claimed it did. The weapons were new and still had their light oil coating from the factory. Clarence was even more taken with the new rifles than Gary. Clarence had never handled an AR-15 or M-16 before in his life and he just sat there speechless. When finally Gary and Clarence recovered, there were endless 'Thank You's' and comments of admiration for the new rifles. Gary didn't much care for the 5.56 caliber, but the 3-round burst feature was something he'd given a lot of thought to and he figured that 3 5.56 rounds probably would do just as good a job of stopping a bad guy as one .308 round. Maybe he was right and maybe he was wrong, but it was now a moot point. The rifle weighed 7.5 pounds and a full 30-round mag only added an additional pound. That compared favorably with his Winchester, which tipped the scales at 6¾ pounds empty. It beat the hell out of the M1A Super Match, which weighed 11.8 pounds unloaded and without the scope. This rifle also had the detachable carrying handle allowing them to add a wide

range of optics.

Ron didn't bother to explain where he'd come with the military rifles and neither Gary nor Clarence asked. But, it was a good bet that Sandy was involved one way or another. There was one other thing and Gary didn't have a clue. After the gun-trading incident, Ron had gone back to Sandy and had explained that he had only sold her the 5.56 ammo to throw Clarence and Gary off the scent. She was more than willing to return the 5.56 CCI ammo from Walmart and Ron paid her cash for the credit she'd allowed him. So, in fact, they had 20,000 rounds of 5.56 ammo for the rifles, not 15,000. Those 5 cases of ammo were buried under a pile of book boxes in Gary's garage.

I can't quite picture 3 old men, all in their 60's driving golf carts that had a Winchester, a shotgun, an M16A3 in an upright bracket mounted to the right side front and one or two Ruger Vaquero's strapped on plus the M1A on their laps. All of that extra weight probably cut the battery life by 5-10%. Chris solved the M1A on the lap situation with his other Christmas present. It was an identical mount for the left side of the vehicle to hold the M1A rifles. And Sharon, bless her heart, had crocheted little blue booties to keep the dust and snow out of the upright rifles. (Wasn't that cute?)

Did you every pay close attention to kids at Christmas time? I have and whether they get 5 presents or 50 presents, they always seem to be looking for one more. Later on Christmas Day, Ron caught Gary looking in a gun magazine reading an article about the M203 grenade launcher. Sandy had those on hand too, but she wanted \$400 apiece for the launchers and \$12.50 each for the HEDP grenades. According to one Field Manual Ron had seen, the normal load out for a Grenadier was 36-rounds. That put the M203 and grenades far out of reach, assuming that they wanted them in the first place. Was one grenade worth the cost of 167 rounds of that Russian rifle ammo? Probably not at this time, but who knew what the future held.

One thing the future held that has not been mentioned to this point in time was a resumption of the banking system. Wells Fargo, for example, maintained its computerized banking equipment not in San Francisco, but in Oregon. It had taken a little extra work but Wells Fargo had its system up and running. No announcements had been made; hence Gary didn't know that he could access his checking account. And it took the feds awhile to sort the problems with their computer systems, but thank Heaven for redundancy. Early in December the feds made the end of November payments for things like Social Security. And, the state of Iowa had essentially escaped unscathed and had made his pension payment into his Wells Fargo account. Since the phones were up, the Internet was up, but it was mostly an on-again, off-again proposition. Discovering during the week after Christmas that he had money in the bank raised Gary's curiosity. He spent several days trying to access his Iowa checking account on the net. Finally he got lucky one day and was able to access the account. Hell, he was rich; there was over 5 grand in the Iowa account.

Gary and Sharon didn't have an ATM card on the Iowa account because they charged \$10 a year for the card. Thus, assuming that the ATM links were up, he still had no way

to access that account. He had checks, but who was going to take a check on a bank located 2,300 miles away a month and a half after this disaster? Their WF account held \$4,652 plus change. That was the \$30 and change they'd left in the account plus two months of \$2,321/month disability pay and pensions. Because they were down to not much more than pocket change, Gary talked it over with Sharon and they decided to withdraw the \$4,632 from WF and leave the \$30 and change in the account. Sharon drove Gary to the nearest Wells Fargo branch that was open and they went inside. Gary wrote a check to Cash for \$4,632 and got in line.

"How are you today?" the clerk greeted them.

"A whole lot better since we found out that we have money in the bank," Gary replied handing her the check.

"Do you want this large or in \$20's?" the clerk asked.

"Whatever you have that spends," Gary chuckled. "Say tell me something would you? I have a checking account in Iowa but I don't have an ATM card for that account. How would I get money from my Iowa account to Wells Fargo? Could we do a reverse transfer or something?"

"Do you have checks for that account?" she asked.

"Sharon?" Gary asked. Sharon reached in her purse and took out the Iowa checkbook.

"How much can I make the check for?" Gary asked, figuring they'd limit him to a few hundred dollars.

"Well Mr. Olsen, you shouldn't make the check for more than you have," the clerk replied straight faced.

Gary was thunderstruck. He checked the check register and wrote out a check for \$5,368, about \$500 less than was in the Iowa account. The clerk took the check, ran it through her MICR reader and waited for the computer screen to announce, "BAD CHECK."

"How would you like the money Mr. Olsen?" she asked, "Same as before?"

"Uh, sure, that would be fine," Gary said.

The clerk was about to say something about not walking around with that much cash when Gary stepped back slightly and she caught sight of the Ruger Vaquero. She didn't say a word. Gary had become so accustomed to wearing the double revolver rig that he'd completely forgotten he was wearing the guns. Maybe that explained why the guard was nervously fingering his pistol. It wasn't until they were halfway home that Gary or Sharon spoke a word.

"I wonder why she didn't give me hell about walking out of the branch with \$10,000 in cash," Gary asked rhetorically.

"She was probably afraid you'd shoot her with one of those Rugers," Sharon laughed.

"Oops," Gary laughed. "I guess that explains why that guard never took his hand off that pistol he was wearing."

"One of these days, dear," Sharon remarked, "You're going to get your dang fool head blown clean off."

"I hope not," Gary replied, "That would hurt like a mother."

"I said head, dear," Sharon laughed, "It probably wouldn't even be fatal."

"Sharon you've got to quit hanging out with Ron so much," Gary scowled.

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When they got back to the house, Ron asked Gary how he'd made out at the bank.

"A billion here, a billion there" Gary smirked, "Pretty soon you're talking about real money. Cleaned out the Wells Fargo account and all but \$500 from my Iowa account Ronald."

"Hmm, I guess that Lyn and I had better head to the bank," Ron replied.

"Tell me something Ron, does Sandy have any M203's?" Gary asked.

"She had some yes, Gar-Bear, but they're \$400 each and those darned rounds are \$12.50 a pop," Ron replied.

"But we wouldn't need one on all three M16A3's would we?" Gary asked.

"I suppose not," Ron said. "But I have about \$3,100 left plus two months of pension so we'll have maybe \$5,500 after we go to the bank. I can afford the launcher, but the ammo is pretty prohibitive."

"Well I think the normal load out is about 36 rounds, partner," Gary said, "What say I buy a launcher and one load out of those grenades?"

"You probably ought to mention it to Clarence, too Gar-Bear, maybe his pension is in the bank too," Ron suggested.

"He gets a pension and Social Security Ron," Gary said, "They might be in pretty good

shape. I know that their home is paid for.”

“We can talk some more when I get back from the bank,” Ron said and got up and left to find Linda.

Gary went and found Clarence sitting on the back patio bundled up and smoking a cancer stick.

“Clarence,” Gary said, “The bank is working again, at least Wells Fargo is. You bank there don’t you?”

“Doesn’t everyone who doesn’t bank at Bank of America?” Clarence chuckled. “That’s good to hear Gary, I ought to get down there and get some cash. I’m down to less than \$100.”

“Well, if you hurry, you might catch Ron and Linda,” Gary suggested, “That’s where they’re headed.”

“I’ll try and catch them,” Clarence replied and hurried to the house.

About 45 minutes later they 3 of them were back from the bank.

“Did everything go ok?” Gary asked.

“I’m better off,” Clarence said, “By the tune of about \$5,200.”

“Gar-Bear you wouldn’t believe it,” Ron said, “Not only was my pension money there, but Linda had one month’s rent on that office building. We have \$5,000 more than I thought we would.”

“Gary, Ron and I were talking on the way to and back from the bank,” Clarence said. “I understand that you want to put those M203 grenade launchers on our M16A3’s”

“Ron and I talked about it yes, Clarence,” Gary said. “A normal load out of 36 grenades would run \$450 and the launcher is \$400, so a launcher and load out would be \$850. I think I’m going to spend the money and cut corners somewhere else.”

“We both decided to do the same thing, Gary,” Clarence announced. “Just as soon as old Ronald can get in touch with Sandy, we’re going to switch from minor to major desperados.”

“Clarence, as old as we are, just about any jail sentence we’d get would be a life sentence,” Gary reflected, “So I don’t really see that we have anything to lose by adding explosives to our arsenals. Anyway, if those gang people ever show up, we may need all of the firepower we can get.”

“You don’t suppose that she’d have any of those bulletproof vests do you?” Clarence asked.

“I don’t really know pal,” Gary said, “But it probably wouldn’t hurt to ask. With all of the equipment we’re going to be carrying, we ought to consider some of that ALICE gear too.”

Ron hung up the phone and said, “Sandy says to come over now.”

They piled into Ron’s car and headed to Sandy’s house. When they arrived, she answered to door promptly and let them in.

“Ron said on the phone that you 3 yard birds are looking to accessorize your 5.56 rifles,” she said and winked.

“Then you know what we’re looking for?” Gary asked.

“The 3 of you are almost predictable,” Sandy chuckled. “I picked them up when I got the rifles for Ron. The thing is fellas, I only have 144 rounds, and they are pretty hard to come by.”

“Is the price still the same as you quoted me before?” Ron asked.

“\$400 for the launcher and \$12.50 per round,” Sandy confirmed.

“We’ll take 3 launchers and the 144 rounds,” Ron said.

Each of the men counted out \$850 and Sand brought the 2 cases of grenades and the 3 launchers up from the basement.

“Sandy, do you have any bulletproof vests?” Clarence asked.

“You mean like the Interceptor QTV with level IV plates?” Sandy asked.

“Yeah, like that,” Clarence said, “That’s the kind that the military uses.”

“And only the military uses,” Sandy came back. “They’re made by Point Blank Body Armor and they cost the government \$1,586 per vest. And, Point Blank can only sell them to the military. I’m afraid they’re out of my league. Sorry Clarence.”

“Dang,” Clarence muttered, “We ought to have some bulletproof vests.”

“I have some of the concealable vests Clarence,” Sandy announced. “They won’t stop rifle bullets but they will stop most, if not all, handgun cartridges.”

“Are they expensive too?’ Clarence asked.

“MSRP on a regular sized level III-A vest is \$450 and for a tall guy like you, \$475,” Sandy explained. “These are the ProMAX vests and they offer side protection too. Now, I can give you boys 20% off the MSRP, but a girl has to make a little profit.”

“So \$360 for the regular and \$380 for our tall friend?” Gary asked.

“Say you’re pretty good with math Gary,” Sandy said. “Yep. That’s the price.”

“Can you fit the three of us?” Ron asked.

“Clarence and Gary are easy Ron,” Sandy replied, “But I’ll have to see if I have an extra fat in stock. You fellas might also want to get some of those wicking T-shirts that go between the vest and your skin. Sweat is pretty hard on a vest. I can let you have them for \$11 each.”

“Must be a pretty fancy T-shirt at \$11 a pop,” Gary observed.

“Not fancy, but elaborate,” Sandy said.

“I don’t know about you 2 fellas,” Gary said, “But I’ll take a vest and 3 T-shirts, Sandy.”

“Well, here we go again,” Clarence grumbled, “Spending money like we have some. Count me in.”

“I believe I can get by with an XL or and XXL,” Ron said, “I’ll take the vest and T-shirts, too.”

“Wise choice fellas,” Sandy said, leaving for a bedroom. She returned with 3 packages, one labeled ‘Gary’, a second labeled ‘Ron’ and the third labeled ‘Clarence’. It occurred to The Three Amigos that she hadn’t been gone long enough to wrap one package, let alone 3.

“Hey, what gives?” Ron asked. “You didn’t have time to wrap those 3 packages.”

“Men, are SO predictable,” Sandy laughed. “And no, I don’t carry MOLLE or ALICE gear. You’ll have to make a run on White’s surplus.”

The Three Amigos counted out the extra money for the vests and T-shirts and loaded their purchases into Ron’s car. Except for the vests. Sandy suggested that they use her bathroom and get into the T-shirts and vests right away. The vests, she pointed out wouldn’t do them any good in the trunk of Ron’s car. After they were properly attired, The Three Amigos headed for the White surplus store on Palmdale Boulevard. White had been busy, or so it appeared. The price tags on everything had the old price crossed out and a new, higher price written in. White, (honestly) was of the Hebrew persuasion. He had a longstanding reputation for adjusting his prices in accordance with

the current situation. Right after 9/11, he'd doubled the price on everything, but cut them back when he got no takers.

The Three Amigos picked out a pair of canteens each, one with a cup and one with a stove, canteen carriers, pistol belts and Y-style padded harnesses, 1 leather flap holster and 2 2-clip mag pouches, (Ron had given them the M16 mag pouches, remember?), a compass pouch, a bandage pouch and a couple of utility pouches to hold their 40mm grenades. White added up the prices of the items and gave them a price. Ronald pulled out the Vaquero and began to examine the firearm closely. White blanched, and re-added the purchases, using the original prices. They paid for their purchases and left. The only words spoken had been by White. First he told them the price and later the revised price. He still made out like a bandit.

"I feel like a fool," Ron said on the way back to Moon Shadows.

"Why's that Ron?" Clarence asked.

"I'll tell you Clarence," Ron replied. "In the first place, I'm 64 years old, and that's awfully old to be playing dress up. In the second place, if I'd wanted to be a soldier, I'd have gone in the Army in 1960, not waited until I was 64 years old with a bad ticker."

"Ron, a man got's to do what a man's got's to do," Clarence observed. "We may feel foolish or silly, but I don't care how old we are. We have an obligation to our families to do the best that we can. Maybe those gangs will never get it together and attack anyone. And even if they do, maybe they will attack somewhere else. But, we can't count on either thing happening. It's like Gary always says, the secret to survival is being prepared. But, there's more to it than that. Gary not only took the time, effort and money to get prepared, but he insisted that we try everything out. You could have all the guns in the world, but they wouldn't do you any good if you didn't know how to shoot. If we hadn't done those trial runs on that shelter out there in the backyard, we wouldn't have knowed that there was problems to fix, like those dehumidifiers. If Gary hadn't gotten off into writing all of those dumb assed survival stories of his, he wouldn't have done the research and knowed how to do some of the things we done to get through this mess. So, I reckon that I don't mind feeling a little foolish or silly."

"Clarence," Ron replied, "I do believe that's the longest speech I've ever heard you make. Planning on running for President are you?"

"Well, maybe I should," Clarence half joked. "I couldn't do any worse a job of it than that John Kerry those liberals elected."

"Don't pick on John Kerry, Clarence," Gary said, "He's a genuine war hero. He got himself 3 Purple Hearts and a Bronze Star."

"Yeah," Clarence said, "After he dictated the write-ups to his CO. Then he came home and gave away somebody's medals. Say, did they ever figure out if he gave away his

own medals or someone else's?"

"Does it really matter?" Ron asked. "Only thing he ever did wrong was marrying the wrong woman. Jane Fonda was more to his temperament."

"Yeah, but old Hanoi Jane ain't as rich as that Heinz woman," Clarence pointed out.

The Three Amigos – Chapter 9 – Sunshine

*We'll sing in the sunshine,
We'll laugh every day,
We'll sing in the sunshine,
Then I'll be on my way.*

*I will never love you,
The cost of love's too dear.
But though I'll never love you,
I'll stay with you one year.*

Maybe that should be called *The Bimbo Song*. The skies were clear and moving into January, it began to get colder. Being they were armed to the teeth and had the extra warmth of their bulletproof vests, The Three Amigos volunteered a lot for roving patrols. They had those golf carts, so it was just a lot of fun circling the tract. And, because of the golf carts, they could make more rounds per hour. They spaced themselves ½ a tract apart and the tract got excellent coverage when 2 of The Three Amigos were on duty. They even carried a thermos of hot coffee and except for when Ron had to make a frequent stop because of his 'water pills' they made good time.

President Kerry had been on TV and radio a couple more times announcing the progress of the cleanup and encroaching a little more each time on the Bill of Rights. So far, he'd steered a wide berth from the 2nd Amendment, but The Three Amigos agreed that it was just a matter of time until that came up. There wasn't any more news of the gang problem and people began to assume that it was just another of Kerry's gimmicks. Not so in the opinion of The Three Amigos. They remained convinced that Murphy's laws were in play and they kept up the patrols and maintained the guard.

Murphy's Law had originated at Edwards AFB in the late 1970's. Aerospace manufacturers picked it up and used it widely in their ads during the next few months, and soon it was being quoted in many news and magazine articles. Murphy's Law was born.

The Northrop project manager, George E. Nichols, had a few laws of his own. Nichols' Fourth Law says, "Avoid any action with an unacceptable outcome."

The doctor, well-known Col. John P. Stapp, had a paradox: Stapp's Ironical Paradox, which says, "The universal aptitude for ineptitude makes any human accomplishment an incredible miracle."

Law 1: If anything can go wrong, it will; Corollary: It can; MacGillicuddy's Corollary: At the most inopportune time.

Law 2: If there is a possibility of several things going wrong, the one that will cause the most damage will be the one to go wrong.

Law 3: If anything just cannot go wrong, it will anyway.

Law 4: If you perceive that there are four possible ways in which something can go wrong, and circumvent these, then a fifth way, unprepared for, will promptly develop
Corollary: It will be impossible to fix the fifth fault, without breaking the fix on one or more of the others.

Law 5: Left to themselves, things tend to go from bad to worse.

Law 6: If everything seems to be going well, you have obviously overlooked something.

Law 7: Nature always sides with the hidden flaw
Corollary: The hidden flaw never stays hidden for long.

Universal Rule: Mother Nature is a bitch.

Murphy's Law of Thermodynamics: Things get worse under pressure.

The Murphy Philosophy: Smile . . . tomorrow will be worse.

Quantization Revision of Murphy's Laws: Everything goes wrong all at once.

Murphy's Constant: Matter will be damaged in direct proportion to its value.

Murphy's Law of Research: Enough research will tend to support whatever theory. Research supports a specific theory depending on the amount of funds dedicated to it.

That should just about cover Mr. Murphy and his laws. There are more, but you get the idea, right? The funny thing was that Gar-Bear rode past the sled track every morning on the way to work at the Rocket Site and had never heard of Murphy back then. But, Gary was at EAFB from 1962 to 1965. It might not be a bad idea to keep Murphy's Laws in mind when you are preparing for survival. The laws seem to be a constant in all forms of human endeavor. Col. Strapp did his rides years before Gar-Bear made it to Edwards.

And, what was with the gangs anyway? Well, LA is a pretty big city and there was a wide strip that had avoided radiation. The gangs had plenty of places to loot and no one tried to interfere. The military slapped a cordon around the area inhabited by the gangs and let them have free reign. They weren't hurting anyone but themselves in the opinions of many. LA had endured the Watts riot of 1965 and the Rodney King riot of 1992. Angelinos had simply endured the riots and rebuilt. And, in the intervening years had found it necessary to defuse more than one situation that was a purely criminal matter that threatened to take on racial overtones and generate another riot.

Speaking of Los Angeles, what about all of those people who did make it to safety in community buildings? As the cleanup crews and the military worked their ways through

the San Fernando Valley, they surfaced. They had been raiding grocery stores to get water and food. No one had a Geiger counter, however, and they weren't certain about how much radiation remained. As a consequence, except for the brief forays for food and water, they remained hunkered down until the military showed up and advised them it was safe to leave. Lacking any better place to put the people, the military and FEMA reopened the camps in Palmdale and other cities and provided food and shelter for the surviving Angelinos. The camps in Palmdale could contain about 125,000 of the relocated people. Lancaster could also house another 125,000.

The new camp residents were also required to work for their calories and the one benefit of the entire situation was that there was a limited amount of transportation available. Therefore, the regular Palmdale and Lancaster residents got a longer than anticipated break after Christmas. Sandy was now doing a land office business, but only selling to the people that Johnny and other members of the Sheriff's Department vouched for. Eventually, Johnny and the others would have to turn around and collect all of those illegal weapons, unless the laws were changed, but for now, they let the people arm themselves because they couldn't handle it by themselves and the military didn't provide enough Guardsmen and soldiers to protect the greatly increased population of the Antelope Valley.

Several groups in the AV had taken the entire situation very seriously, like those 3 old guys at Moon Shadows. But, Johnny and the other Deputies noticed that not as many were taking the matter as seriously as one would have thought they should. Lancaster was far better prepared, as a whole than Palmdale, for example. But then Lancaster had been the principle community in the AV for a long time and it had a lot more of the militia types. These were the people who didn't really need to buy anything from a gun dealer except a little extra ammunition. And when the state told everyone to turn in their illegal guns, the people in Lancaster had seemed to become deaf in a big hurry. Lancaster was probably one of the best armed communities in California. Lancaster had grown over the years, changing the demographics slightly. But, Palmdale had been the fastest growing city in California for a long time and had outgrown Lancaster. Lancaster was fairly conservative, but Palmdale was populated by a lot of liberals from LA.

It should be noted that Sandy wasn't a class III dealer. That wasn't to say that she didn't deal in the class III weaponry, but just that all of her class III activities were illegal as hell. She ran a scrupulously honest gun store, adhering to the letter of the law. Periodic visits from the ATF always saw her getting a clean bill of health. And, when the feds asked the LA County Sheriff's Department about Sandy, the Deputies universally gave Sandy glowing reports about honesty and her conformance with the state and local laws. You have to realize that Sandy was an extremely cautious individual. She refused to buy any 'illegal' arm that happened in her door. This fact was something Gary had commented on in an earlier story when he told about how he'd regained his tricked out Mini-14. Sandy hadn't been interested in buying the rifle because of the Butler folding stock and the flashhider. Before she could resell the gun through the store, she'd have had to remove the flashhider and replace the stock. Her class III side business was just that, a side business, totally separate from her gun store. At least it had been until the

present emergency.

And when Sandy made trips to places like Nevada to pick up things like those rifles, she used the name 'Cash', as in greenbacks and folding money and you don't really want to know my name anyway. So while Hasher had a point in his comment, don't let it throw you. It was nice to have an illegal arms dealer in Palmdale and those Deputies were some of her best customers. They could have acquired the arms legally, but at a higher price and besides, what the Sheriff didn't know couldn't turn around and bite them on the butt. A bad guy with a gun illegal or otherwise was in for a heap of trouble. However, a good guy in possession of a questionable or illegal firearm sometimes was allowed to keep the weapon if the Deputy was well satisfied with the individual's character. The only real difference between California and states where automatic weapons were legal under the state law was that the weapons in the other states were frequently in the ATF database. California had no such problem. And, if the local, state and federal authorities couldn't disarm the gangs, what made anyone think that they could disarm the good citizens who kept a very low profile because they knew they were breaking the law and were nervous about it? Nada. Zip. Zilch. Zero.

Monday, 17Jan06...

This was a National Holiday according to the calendar. It didn't much feel like a holiday, but what does a holiday feel like? There hadn't been any attacks on Moon Shadows and the residents were a little restless. Good fortune had smiled on some as their employers had reopened their businesses, usually manufacturing plants, in LA to fill mostly government orders. Perhaps they were restless because after having gotten back to work, finally, they had to take a day off to observe the holiday. It hadn't been easy there in Moon Shadows after the folks got their Christmas break from the cleanup activities down below. Some of the residents had gotten the idea into their heads that they didn't like the system of internal government that had been setup to keep Moon Shadows safe. They approached the 4 'ruling' members of the tract on that day and suggested, rather forcefully, that the tract might be better served if the entire population were allowed to vote on the more important issues.

In all the town and all the cities, there are no statutes to committees, Gary said after the representatives of the other group had left.

"Huh?" Ron responded.

"It's just something I learned in college, Ronald," Gary explained.

"I heard you say it before Gar-Bear, but what's the point?" Ron asked.

"Just this, partner," Gary went on, "When decisions are made by a committee or consensus vote of a lot of people, it becomes decisive in a couple of ways. First, you usually have two or more camps springing up. Second, when they do reach an agreement it isn't always the best decision for the group. That's why very large corporations are

managed by very small superstructures, like the CEO and the Board of Directors. That's essentially what we've had here up to now, a Board of Directors. Patti and Darlene let us know about problems and the four, well I guess six, of us respond to the problem or issue."

"What are you going to do about what those people wanted?" Clarence asked.

"Nothing," Gary said.

"Nothing?" Ron reflected.

"That's right partner, nothing," Gary explained. "I'm going to go along with what Chris, Dick and Randy decide. We have our own little compound here and if necessary, I'm going to secede from the housing tract."

*Johnny Yuma was a rebel...
he roamed through the west...
did Johnny Yuma, the rebel...
he wandered alone*

Ron began to sing in his deep voice.

*"He got fightin' mad...
this rebel lad...
he packed no star...
as he wandered far...
where the only law...
was a hook and a draw...
the rebel, Johnny Yuma*

"You got that right partner," Gary said, "And as far as I'm concerned, you can add, screw 'em if they can't take a joke. Sometimes there simply too much democracy for anyone's good."

"Gary, how do you really feel on the subject of home rule?" Clarence asked.

"Well, Sharon rules this home and that's all I need to know," Gary joined in the laughter.

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The committee of 4 discussed the matter brought before them by the homeowners and they reluctantly agreed that the homeowners had a right to have a voice in the running of the tract. Just as he said he was going to do, Gary went along with the majority. Then he announced that the folks at 4560 Moonraker Road were withdrawing from the guard duty assignments. After the meeting The Three Amigos returned to the house.

“Well, I hope this works out like you planned, Gary,” Clarence said.

“Frankly Clarence, I don’t care,” Gary replied.

Then Gary did something a bit out of character, even for him. He dug around in a box in the garage and came up with 2 3x5’ flags. One was the Gadsden Flag and the other was the Stars and Bars. Gary took handles off 2 old brooms and attached the flags. He then took the 4-step step stool out to the front patio and mounted the 2 flags. They moved the 3 golf carts to the back patio and Gary explained to everyone that 4560 Moonraker Road was on its own until the yahoos came to their senses. Patti came down later and had a talk with Sharon, but left shaking her head. The Three Amigos noticed later that there were no more roving guard patrols. Was this going to turn into a case of cutting off your nose (or ear) to spite your face? Only time would tell, I guess.

18Jan06...

“Have you figured out that sight for the M203 yet” Gary asked.

“Yeah,” Ron said, “It just works in the reverse of a normal sight. Nothing much to it, but it will take a little getting used to.”

“It’s a shame that Sandy didn’t have any practice rounds,” Gary offered, “It would be nice to know how the thing works before we actually have to use it.”

“True,” Ron agreed, “But she didn’t and I don’t think it would be prudent to waste a good round figuring the gadget out. We’ll just have to trust the sights and get a little OJT.”

“It would suit me just fine if we never have to figure out how to fire those things,” Clarence said.

“That would be nice,” Gary agreed.

“It sure didn’t take them long to eliminate the roving patrols,” Ron observed.

“Did they eliminate the guards on the entrance?” Gary asked.

“Don’t really know partner, no one has been off the lot since you got in your snit,” Ron replied.

“Snit? Did I hear you say snit?” Gary asked.

“Yeah, why?” Ron said.

“No reason. I’m going to walk up to the corner and see if there is anyone on the gate,” Gary said.”

Gary took the two crossbars off the gate and swung it open. Missy was in the yard and came running, so he closed the gate, went into the Living Room, got her harness and leash and took her with him. He walked to the corner in front of Chris and Patti's and looked towards the entrance. The entrance was unguarded.

"They decided that we didn't need any guards," Chris said coming out of his garage.

"Do you agree with that, Chris?" Gary asked.

"Not really, no," Chris replied. "But that's what the majority wanted so we went along."

"Chris, they are wrong," Gary responded. "I went along with the majority just to keep the peace. However, it just seemed prudent to keep the people living at our house out of the fray."

"Is that why you put up those 2 flags," Chris chuckled.

"In a way, I suppose so, yes," Gary answered. "That Don't Tread on Me flag is called the Gadsden Flag and it's been around since the beginning of this country and is a symbol of Independence. The Rebel Flag just signifies my disagreement with the new power structure."

"Well, I just went along for the same reason and so did Dick and Randy," Chris announced. "The three of us are going to find some more barbed wire and posts and fence in our properties."

"I'm sure that everyone at our house will be happy to pitch in and help with that Chris," Gary responded. "You just let me know where and when and we'll all be here to lend a hand."

"Gee, thanks," Chris said, "I thought you were really po'd."

"I am, but not at any of you folks," Gary replied. "But a ship can only have one Captain, so to speak and I thought we were doing a pretty good job of running the security of the tract the way it was going. But no, all those liberals insist on a democracy so let them have it."

"Dick has been spending his nights with us," Chris announced, ignoring the liberal remark. "He can't stay up 24-hours a day. And I understand that Randy and Pam have been staying up half nights taking turns guarding their home. With Dick and Matt, we're a little better off."

"I suppose that you and Dick and Matt, together with Randy and Pam and all of the folks at our house could resume the security, Chris," Gary allowed, "But it just really bothers me that we should have to be the ones to provide security for the others. But I'll tell everyone to keep an eye out on your place. We can't really see Randy and Pam's from our

house.”

“We’ve also been talking about just fencing Dick’s place and all of us moving in there,” Chris pointed out. “The problem with that is that my house affords the best view of the entrance.”

“If you decided to do that Chris,” Gary said, “We could use your house as an Observation Post (OP) and I could get some of our guys to man it. But you know, if you can get enough wire, why not wire up all three places and still stay at Dicks? That 2 story between Dick’s house and your house has an even better view of the front entrance than your house does. I know, I checked it out for one of my stories. That east upstairs bedroom of the house in between has the best view of the entrance in the tract.”

“What we could do is wire up the 3 houses and stay at home,” Chris offered. “You have that 25 watt base station on my racing radio frequencies so we could move it to the Klein house and you could maintain the OP.”

“That would leave my house without a radio on the same frequency,” Gary objected. “But that’s the start of an idea. Let us bounce it around and see what we can come up with. Meanwhile let me know when you’re ready to put in the barbed wire. Come on Missy, you get to walk the whole neighborhood today.”

“Later,” Chris said as Gary and Missy began the tour.

Gary was wearing the 2 Vaqueros and he also had on his Laredo’s. Between Missy pulling and the weight of the guns and those boots, he decided that from now on, Missy was going to get a walk while he drove the golf cart. He could always add 6’ of rope to the leash. When he got back, he sat down with Ron, Clarence, David and John to discuss what Chris and he talked about. When they got to the part of about the radios, Clarence suggested that they look in the Yellow Pages and find a radio dealer. Maybe they could come up with some more of the Radius 50 radios. Gary told Clarence that they hadn’t made them in a long time, but that if the Internet would cooperate, he’d look up what Motorola was now offering.

From that website, Gary was able to determine that the Motorola CP200 was the closest model to Chris’s Radius 50’s. Gary had the CM300 in the shelter. With the Li-ion batteries, these new CP200 radios beat the hell out of the old Radius 50’s. For one thing, they had 4 channels instead of two. The price wasn’t much different from what he’d paid for the Radius 50’s 10 years before. Just \$100 a radio cheaper that was all; it was sort of one of those cheaper at ½ the price deals. And in the AV, there was a Motorola dealer listed. They needed 9 radios if they were to all have one and that would set them back a little over \$1,000 per amigo, but it certainly would improve security. Gary borrowed one of Chris’s radios and took it and his CM300 just to make sure all of the frequencies were the same.

There had been some talk of building an OP in the backyard to give them a better view,

but having an OP in the empty Klein house beat that idea all hollow. It took the guy a while to program all of the radios, the two frequencies on Chris's radios were crystal controlled and set the baseline, but they now were well equipped in the radio department. Gary suggested that the dealer get 2 more of the CP200's and 1 more CM300 set up for the same frequencies. He was going to send his friend Randy over to get 2 portable radios, a base station and a base station antenna.

When they got back to the tract, Dick and Chris were unloading Chris's pickup. They must have had every spool of barbed wire left in the AV (not really). They had 10' steel posts, too, not the PVC kind. Gary returned Chris's radio and took the new radios and put them in one of the two 6 slot fast recharging stands they'd picked up. He went over to Randy and Pam's and filled them in on the radio business and told them that the dealer was saving them a base station, a base station antenna and 2 portable radios, all preconfigured to the frequencies they were using. Gary gave Randy the dealer's card and returned to pick up everyone so they could help Chris, Matt and Dick. Since Dick had been staying at Chris and Patti's, they did Chris and Patti's house first. That took the rest of the 18th and the 19th.

On the afternoon of the 19th, Gary sent one of David's boys to put in the postholes at Dick's and at Randy's; and later that day, two more of the boys to put in the posts. On the morning of the 20th, they were ready to start the wire at Dick and Randy's. The thing was, the 20th was a Friday and they didn't want to have to work Sunday. They had extra help from Patti and Darlene and on the morning of the 20th the concertina was coiled, ready to install. So, while Chris took care of the gates, they worked well into the night. They used the lamps that Chris used in the pits at the racetrack to provide light. Darlene wasn't part of the homeowner's movement and late Saturday night after they put the finishing touches on the three homes, she asked when they were going to wire up her home. Gary jestingly suggested that Darlene move in with Dick. And, what had started out as a joke turned into reality. I don't mean to suggest that they were sleeping together or anything, but Darlene and her son and daughter did pack 3 suitcases and move. Dick had a 3-bedroom house so they probably worked out some sort of sleeping arrangement. (Forget it, if Dick and Darlene had wanted to get together they didn't need a disaster for an excuse and probably would have done so before now.)

This new arrangement worked out fine. Randy, Dick, Chris, Matt, Gary, David, Jason, Justin, Josh, Jesse, Clarence, Ron and John worked out a perfectly acceptable guard schedule among the 13 of them. Patti, Darlene and Pam even volunteered, making 16 people to share the responsibility of guarding the 4 homes. But, Gary wasn't quite ready to give up his mad and he suggested that they just communicate by radio; the rest of the residents', he said, could fend for themselves. Consequently the old battle klaxon that they'd found at the junkyard wouldn't be sounded in case of an attack. Gary did not have a grudge against the other residents. God helps them that help themselves, or so the some book says. Maybe these people knew something he didn't, but don't put a lot of money on it. Fleataxi insisted that the difference between a liberal and a conservative was that the liberal hadn't been mugged, yet. Hell, this bunch of liberal democracy loving neighbors had probably even unloaded those AK's.

Sunday, 22Jan06...

Johnny showed up during the late morning. When he didn't find Darlene and the kids' home, he went to Chris and Patti's to see what had happened to them. Patti told him they'd moved in with Dick. She called Dick and Dick opened the gate and invited Johnny in. Darlene and her daughter were still sleeping. The boy woke up and got his sister. Johnny took due note of the fact that Darlene was sleeping with the daughter. Not that he minded one way or another, but there were proprieties to be observed, especially around his young son. On the other hand this was California and the year was 2006 and Johnny hadn't been perfect either.

After Johnny had visited with the kids for a while he surveyed the situation at Moon Shadows. Chris filled him in on what had transpired with the other resident's and how the four, oops five, families had decided to go it alone. He showed Johnny the OP with its commanding view of the entrance and Johnny generally approved. Then, Johnny gave him the bad news, which was why he'd come by in the first place. The LA gangs had broken out of the Army's cordon and were doing a pretty thorough job of razing the Inland Empire. Johnny said that he thought they would settle there until the supplies ran out. The Army had been unable to stop the gangs, but they had managed to get the few survivors in the Inland Empire to Palm Springs and set up in a FEMA Camp in that city. The Army was now actively assaulting the gangs, too, but apparently the gangs had raided several armories in the LA area and were as well equipped as the Army.

Johnny went on to say that the Army had erected what amounted to an armor barrier over in the Banning area. The gangsters wouldn't be able to penetrate that barrier without a heavy loss of life and he, Johnny, expected that they would go north on I-15 out of the Inland Empire. Now, if they kept going on I-15 that would put them in Victorville 50 miles to the east. Conversely, if they picked up highway 138 at the foot of the Cajon Pass, it would put them in Palmdale. Either way, they'd taken about 2 months to work LA over and you could expect that it would take them nearly as long to work San Bernardino and the surrounding communities over. Maybe the end of March, or the first part of April, trouble could be heading their way. At the moment, there was no way to tell. However, Johnny did point out that regardless, once they finished with Victorville, assuming they went that way, there wasn't a hell of a lot to the north to appeal to them except Barstow and then Las Vegas.

Nice rocket launchers those boys down at the other house had, Johnny said. Probably got them from you know who. Chris said that he didn't know, but Johnny was probably right. Those 3 guys were always looking for something bigger and better. They only had 48 grenades per rifle according to what one of them had said. Johnny mumbled something about that being a fact worth knowing and said he had to get back to the Sheriff's station. As it happened, Johnny knew for a fact that Sandy had one hell of a lot more of the grenades and launchers. And in all of the chaos that usually results from a disaster of this magnitude, the Sheriff's Department had received a shipment of refitted M16A2's. The normal policy of the Sheriff's department was to switch out the sear or

trigger-housing group to render the weapons incapable of anything other than semi-automatic fire. Because of the disaster several of the weapons had ended up in Palmdale and Lancaster at the Sheriff's substations in unmodified condition. And, to compound the error, the paperwork had gotten lost in the shuffle. The paperwork wasn't all that had gotten lost in the shuffle, 1 of the 4 cases of weapons had disappeared. The Department had been looking high and low for those 12 weapons, but they hadn't come up with them yet.

The Three Amigos – Chapter 10 – Seminole Wind

*Ever since the days of old
Men would search for wealth untold
They'd dig for silver and for gold
And leave the empty holes;
And way down south in the Everglades
Where the black water rolls and the saw grass waves
The eagles fly and the otters play
In the land of the Seminole;*

Chorus

*So blow, blow Seminole wind
Blow like you're never gonna blow again;
I'm callin' to you like a long-lost friend
But I don't know who you are;
And blow, blow from the Okeechobee
All the way up to Micanopy (pronounced: Meh-can-o-pee)
Blow across the home of the Seminole*

*The alligator and the gull
Progress came and took its toll
And in the name of flood control
They made their plans and they drained the land
Now the Glades are goin' dry
And the last time I walked in the swamp
I stood up on a cypress stump
I listened close and I heard the ghost
Of Osceola cry*

Chorus X2

[And now you know Sharon's favorite song...we got to see JA live once at the Lancaster Performing Arts Center, wonderful!]

Why do a group of Indians in Oklahoma and Florida belong in a story about a post-nuclear holocaust in California in 2006? The Seminoles of Florida call themselves the "Unconquered People," descendants of just 300 Indians who managed to elude capture by the US Army in the 19th century. The Medal of Honor, this nation's highest honor for valor, was awarded to four Seminole-Negro Indian Scouts. Buffalo Soldier Regimental returns show that after twelve engagements and twenty expeditions, not one of their men was killed or seriously wounded in their seventeen-year history from 1868-1885. These young men of pure African or mixed black and Seminole ancestry, dressed, acted and possessed trailing, hunting and fighting skills like those of the plains Indians. Their number varied between thirty to fifty scouts. They were probably the best desert fighters and trackers in the history of the United States Army.

Clarence, you see, had an interest in the Seminole Indians. It might be because of his special feelings for the Buffalo Soldiers, as the 10th Cavalry was known. Now some might tell you that the Nez Perce deserved that honor. Chief Joseph, however, was more famous for his speech.

*I am tired of fighting. Our chiefs are killed. Looking Glass is dead. Toohoolhoolzote is dead. The old men are all dead. It is the young men who say, 'Yes' or 'No.' He who led the young men [Olikut] is dead. It is cold, and we have no blankets. The little children are freezing to death. My people, some of them, have run away to the hills, and have no blankets, no food. No one knows where they are – perhaps freezing to death. I want to have time to look for my children, and see how many of them I can find. Maybe I shall find them among the dead. Hear me, my chiefs! I am tired. My heart is sick and sad. From where the sun now stands **I will fight no more forever.***

And, Gary and Sharon had a special place in their hearts for the Indians, the Native Americans, too. And maybe, just maybe, Gary had a little of Osceola's spirit in him, but none of Chief Joseph's. Joseph had done what he had thought best for his people and given up. Osceola had been captured during peace negotiations, while under a white flag. He died a short time later of Malaria. The Three Amigos weren't about to give up. There was the tradition of Osceola and the 10th Cavalry to uphold. They might not fight with their fellow residents over something that was of small import, but if the gangs did show up, they were in for the fight of their lives. Got it? Good.

Those rocket launchers that Johnny was referring to were the M203 grenade launchers, of course. Johnny figured that Sandy owed him a big one or two or three. So he went to see her and when he got there, it went like this:

"Hi Sandy," Johnny said, "I have 6 genuine M16A2's and I want to make a trade."

"Where did you steal those, Johnny?" Sandy asked.

"What makes you think they're stolen?" Johnny asked.

"Well, the word is that the Sheriff's Department is missing a case of 12 M16A2's that got shipped to Palmdale or Lancaster by mistake," Sandy explained. "You showing up with 6 of them is a little obvious, wouldn't you say?"

"Be that as it may, and I can neither confirm nor deny that these are part of that bunch of missing rifles," Johnny said, "I happen to know that you have a bunch of those M203's and I want to trade these 6 rifles for 6 M203's and a reasonable supply of grenades."

"Well a M203 and a M16 cost me about the same, Johnny," Sandy said, "But those grenades are expensive. What else do you have to offer?"

"Information, Sandy," Johnny said, "Just information. What I want is 72 M433 HEDP rounds for each of those 6 M203's plus another 108 rounds to give to some friends. On top of that, I want about 144 of those canister rounds. Plus 27 practice rounds."

"That must be some pretty valuable information Johnny," Sandy said. "Assuming I could fill that order, that's something on the order of 700 grenades."

"711, to be precise," Johnny interrupted.

"Johnny, 711 grenades at \$12.50 each is \$8,887.50 worth of grenades," Sandy protested, "That information you have must be solid gold."

"It is," Johnny assured her, "How much money have you made off the business we've sent your way over the past few years that you've been an illegal arms dealer?"

"I never counted," Sandy replied, "A lot I suppose."

"Like every dime you've ever made selling illegal arms Sandy," Johnny said, "But I don't want to put a fine point on it."

"What do you mean every dime?" Sandy objected. "I screened some of those customers myself like Ron and the boys."

"Care to know who the very first customer you ever had was?" Johnny asked.

"You've known about my side business for that long?" Sandy said.

"Since I was a rookie," Johnny grinned. "Besides, you are inflating those prices a whole lot. I happen to know where you bought those stolen grenades and you only gave that sucker \$5 apiece for them. So, you'd only actually be out \$3,555, girl. And, assuming you remain in business, you'd make up the loss in about 3-4 days."

"What do you mean assuming I'd remain in business?" Sandy snapped.

"Well now, that brings us right back to the information, doesn't it?" Johnny replied.

"It sounds like blackmail to me," Sandy said, "But what choice do I have?"

"All right, I'll give you the information for free Sandy and if it isn't worth \$3,500 to you, we'll just forget the whole thing," Johnny said.

"I'm game, Johnny," Sandy said, "But I can't imagine what information would be worth \$3,500 to me."

"The ATF has been snooping around in Palmdale and Lancaster," Johnny said. "They're pretty certain that one of the local gun dealers is involved in the illegal arms trade. They

are thinking about a sting operation. I happen to know who the guy is that they're going to use in the sting operation."

"Did you bring someone to help you haul the grenades?" Sandy asked.

"I did not," Johnny said. "I figured you could just deliver them to The Three Amigos over there in Moon Shadows and I'd take it from there."

"Are you talking about Ron, Gary and Clarence?" Sandy asked.

"Those are the guys, Sandy," Johnny said, "They sometimes go by the name The Three Amigos."

"That's 59+ cases of grenades you know," Sandy said, "I guess I'd better get started loading."

"Don't forget the M16A2's," Johnny said.

"Those 6 M16A2's are going to be the most expensive M16's I'll ever sell," Sandy said. "Don't forget to let me know who the sting guy is or you're going down with me."

"Got you covered, Sandy," Johnny said and then gave her the guy's name.

Sandy recognized the name immediately. The guy had an appointment for 9am the next morning. Johnny didn't bother to tell her that he'd been standing next to the guy when he'd made the call. Sometimes, timing was everything. Johnny took the 6 M203's and put them in the trunk of his patrol car with the other 6 rifles. There was also a cardboard box full of used mags that had new springs and followers. His next stop was Moon Shadows to talk to Chris and Dick. Darlene and he might be divorced, but the kids needed protecting and those 6 M16A2's might make all of the difference in an attack if one came. God did indeed help him who helped himself, although maybe God hadn't meant it EXACTLY that way.

A closed delivery truck pulled up in front of Gary and Sharon's house. Sandy got out and hollered for someone to open the gate and give her a hand. They took one look at what she had and unloaded the truck in a New York minute, as if they were taken completely by surprise. Sandy explained that Johnny would be by later to explain how to divide up the grenades. They didn't tell Sandy that Johnny had come straight to Moon Shadows from her home. Johnny did also happen to mention that Sandy had only paid \$5 per grenade. The guys were to take 36 M433 grenades, 16 of the canister grenades and 3 of the practice grenades for each of their M203's. They'd paid Sandy a total of \$1,800 for the original 144 grenades. This gift from Johnny lowered their cost to \$4.95 per grenade or \$.05 less per grenade than Sandy had paid for them in the first place. It sort of turned out that everyone was happy. Johnny gave the 6 rifles to Chris, Matt, Dick, Randy, Pam and Darlene. He also left precise instructions concerning distribution of the grenades.

Do you recall that Johnny had said rocket launchers when he meant grenade launchers? Do you know what a Freudian slip is? It is a verbal mistake that is thought to reveal an unconscious belief, thought, or emotion. Johnny must have been thinking about rocket launchers when he made his slip of the tongue. It seemed that Sergeant John Jones had a few acquaintances in the Department in Los Angeles that got involved in cleaning up a ransacked armory. The Deputies had picked up a trunk load of LAWS Rockets with every intention of turning them over to the Army. But then, a major disagreement had broken out in another part of LA and they had to respond to the call Code 3. The disagreement had turned into a standoff situation aka barricaded suspect and had gone on for several hours. In the chaos that followed, which included one of the two Deputies nearly getting killed, the men had simply forgotten the trunk full of Rockets.

And, when they finally did remember the next day, Johnny happened to be in LA. Johnny had responded to another of those 'all units' calls and had run into the two guys. They mentioned that they were going to have to put off making their next call because they had a trunk full of LAWS Rockets. Being the good-natured fella that he was, Johnny offered to help them out. He'd take care of the Rockets for them so they could make that next call. Well, the guys figured that the matter was closed because a Sergeant had taken the Rockets. The Sergeant had taken the Rockets all right, straight to Palmdale. They were sitting in his garage.

"Well hell partner," Ron said, "We sort of ended up on the good end of that grenade deal."

"I probably wouldn't have taken them," Gary replied, "But when I found out how much Sandy jacked up the price, I figured what the hell."

"In a pig's eye, you lying sack," Ron said, "You'd have taken them if they cost Sandy \$12.49 apiece."

"Can't scam you on anything, can I?" Gary laughed.

"Maybe yes and maybe no," Ron said, "But even if I was born yesterday, I was downtown all day playing with the big kids."

"That saying is older than you are," Gary groaned.

"Maybe, but it works for me," Ron replied.

"Are you two at it again?" Clarence asked entering the Living Room. "I swear that you two have a contest going just to see who can out do the other."

"I guess our secret is out Gar-Bear," Ron laughed. "Of course good old Clarence never takes part in any of the tom foolery."

“Well, I didn’t say that Ron,” Clarence grinned. “I have my moments.”

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“When are we going to get the horses?” Clarence continued.

“What horses?” Gary asked.

“Ron told me that you write horses into most of your survival stories, Gary,” Clarence explained. “What’s this story about some horse named Salina?”

“Clarence that happened in 1976, for crying out loud,” Gary shook his head. “If you know that much, Ron must have told you the whole story.”

“He did, but I just wanted to hear your version of it,” Clarence acknowledged.

“Clarence, you’ve heard most of the things that happened to me when I was young,” Gary said. “For example, you know about the sidewinder we caught in the john and the gopher snake story and the Mojave Green rattlesnake story. I do believe I mentioned getting almost electrocuted on San Nicholas Island, and the story about the time I got drunk on payday and knocked down a concrete wall. And about the time I got drunk and went hunting the bimbo with a .30-30 rifle. We probably all have a bunch of stories about the strange things that happened to us back in our drinking days.”

“Have you been having trouble with bimbos for that long Gar-Bear?” Ron interrupted.

“Ron, I’ve almost begun to believe that with notable exceptions all the women I meet are bimbos,” Gary said.

“Gar-Bear,” Ron said, “We’ve had this discussion before. There is nothing wrong with the women, partner. It’s your picker that’s broke.”

“What about the horses?” Clarence asked.

“Forget it,” Gary and Ron both said.

“I’ll tell you what Clarence,” Gary continued, “If it’s important to you, you can get Chris to paint the name Salina on my golf cart.”

“Not to change the subject,” Clarence lied, “But when did Johnny say those gang bangers might show up?”

“End of March, first of April if they come here,” Ron repeated “And end of May or the first of June if they go to Victorville first. But Victorville and the Apple Valley are pretty small Clarence. About the only thing there is the Roy Rogers museum. I’d think sooner rather than later.” [In 2003, the Museum was moved from Victorville to Branson. At-

tendance fell off and it was later closed. The final auction of the Museum contents occurred the weekend of April 9, 2001 in Texas.]

“Really?” Clarence asked. “Crap.”

As more for their own protection than that of the residents, The Three Amigos decided that they ought to man the front gate they’d put in for the housing tract. Their plan, if you could call it a plan, was for one of them to stand by the gate in his golf cart in 4-hour shifts. This wasn’t to replace the observer in the OP, but to allow them to keep the gate locked with their golf cart. The gate would be attached to the front of the golf cart with a short piece of rope and when someone they knew came, they’d simply back the cart up opening the gate. But, therein lay another problem. They didn’t know everyone in the housing tract. So, it was necessary to get a Polaroid camera and take pictures of all of the cars. Patti and Darlene agreed to help them out with their scheme because Patti and Darlene knew everybody and everybody’s car (and probably their underwear size). It took a full two weeks before they had all of the pictures. It also irritated the hell out of the other residents who were members of ‘the other side’. But the story about Gary and Dan had made the rounds a few times and rather than have Gary or Ron or Clarence pull down on them, the residents grudgingly went along.

A couple of times during those two weeks, people who genuinely didn’t belong were turned away, but not before a snapshot of the car was taken. A few other times, visitors of the other residents were held at the gate until the guy on the gate got someone with a radio to go get the resident and vouch for the visitor. It’s hard to say what happened, but eventually someone must have realized that the guys weren’t doing the guard routine for their own amusement and eventually the residents started to warn the guys when they had expected visitors.

Probably the single event that began to change peoples’ minds was when the soon to be ex-husband of a woman who had moved in with her sister got an unexpected visit from the husband. The husband was a violent type and was under a restraining order to stay at least 100’ feet from the wife except when they were both in the courtroom. He showed up one afternoon with a snootful and had tracked the wife down to Moon Shadows. Clarence had the duty that afternoon and Clarence routinely loaded a canister grenade in his M16A3 and used the M16A3 when he was on guard duty.

Clarence with his 20+ years of sobriety had been out on any number of 12-step calls and knew how to deal with a drunk. He also could spot a drunk from 20 feet away just by the person’s behavior. The guy pulled up and blasted on his horn. Clarence took one look at the guy and realized that he didn’t belong and that he was drunk. Ron was up in the OP and when he heard the horn blast he grabbed his binoculars and started to pay close attention. Clarence had his radio set to vox and he simply said, “I’ve got a drunk here who doesn’t belong.” Ron picked up his radio and told Gar-Bear to call the Sheriff. Then, Ron went down and got in his golf cart and headed to the gate as fast as the pokey golf cart would go. Meanwhile, Clarence slipped the selector to auto on his M16A3 and got up to challenge the man.

“You got business here?” Clarence asked.

“What the business is that of yours?” the drunk asked.

“Sir I’m the security guard for this housing tract,” Clarence responded, “and I can’t let you in unless you have business here.”

Ron was about ½ way to the gate by this time and old Gar-Bear had called 911 and was on the way to join his pals, but hadn’t rounded the corner from Moonraker to Stardust.

“I got business here,” the drunk said, “Get the hell out of my way or I’ll just run over you and that golf cart of yours.”

“Who do you wish to see?” Clarence asked.

“My wife,” the drunk said, “I’m telling you for the last time to get the hell out of my way.”

Ron had arrived and his M203 wasn’t loaded, but it didn’t take him long to put a M433 into the launcher, switch his M16A3 to auto and crank one into the action. And Ron wasn’t being quite as nice as Clarence; he pointed that M16A3 right at the drunk. His golf cart was also against the gate making it twice as hard for the drunk to carry out his threat of pushing the golf cart(s) out of the way. Gary was bringing up the rear and about ½ way to the gate by this time and Ron and Clarence could hear a sirens approaching in the distance.

Ron was perfectly willing to shoot the asshole if it came to that, but only as a last resort. The guy gunned his motor slightly and began to push against the gate. Ron pointed his rifle at the car’s grill and let go with a burst. That didn’t stop the guy, who must have been pretty darned drunk. Even though he now had water leaking from his radiator, the guy pushed against the gate again and both Ron and Clarence now fired a burst into the grill of the car. By this time Gary had arrived and he had his shotgun in hand. It was loaded with 00 buck and slugs alternatively and the round in the barrel was 00 buck.

Gary slammed his cart into the gate and without even getting out of the cart, let loose with that load of 00 buck into the grill of the car. By this time the car was leaking like a sieve and you could hear 3 or 4 sirens approaching rapidly. But drunks sometimes tend to have a single-minded focus and the guy just pushed harder on the gate. Gary jacked the slug into the chamber and pulled down on the guy prepared to shoot, his adrenalin running by the gallons and he was visibly shaking. Just at that moment a patrol car skidded to a stop almost striking the drunk’s car. The Three Amigos immediately ported arms to avoid a hassle from the Deputy. The Deputy sized the situation up in a second or two and pulled his service pistol while shouting to The Three Amigos to put down their guns. The three men didn’t require any further prompting and when the Deputy approached the car, he could smell the booze. Noting that the three old guys had complied immediately the Deputy told the drunk to get out of the car.

Just then, a second car slid to a stop followed moments later by a third car driven by Johnny. Since Johnny 1) knew The Three Amigos and could see that they had put down their weapons; 2) could smell the booze; and 3) recognized the drunk and knew of the restraining order, he ordered the other two deputies to get the drunk out of the car and cuff him.

“What’s going on here fellas?” Johnny asked.

“We got a deuce and he tried to force his way into the tract,” Ron said.

Clarence nodded in agreement as did Gary.

“Would you happen to have a gal named Janice Worth living here with her sister?” Johnny asked.

“We ain’t too good on names Johnny,” Clarence replied, but there’s a new redhead moved in the other day with her family.

“Redhead, about 45 with two kids and a figure that’s hard to forget?” Johnny asked.

“Well, that sounds like her,” Clarence asked. “I was on the gate and I asked him if he had business here. He did say he was here to see his wife.”

“I see you managed to shoot the crap out of his car,” Johnny grinned.

“Not until he tried to use his car to push the golf carts out of the way,” Ron said. “Then I put a burst into his grill.”

“What happened next?” Johnny asked.

“He tried to push both Ron and my carts out of the way and we both put a burst into his grill,” Clarence replied.

“And then?” Johnny continued.

“I arrived and put my cart against the gate and put a shotgun blast into the grill, Johnny, 15-pellet 00 buck,” Gary explained.

“Go on,” Johnny continued.

“I pumped in a slug and was about to put one in him when he kept pushing on the gate,” Gary continued, “But the Deputy over there showed up and asked us to put down our guns so we complied.”

“Any more to the story?” Johnny asked.

“The Deputy told the drunk to get out of the car and the two of you pulled in,” Gary concluded. “End of story.”

“Did any of you see a gun?” Johnny asked.

The Three Amigos all shook their heads in the negative.

“Hold on a minute,” Johnny said.

Johnny walked over to the Deputies, had a brief conversation with the first officer on the scene. When they’d frisked the drunk, he had a Browning Hi-Power stuck in his back waistband that was now in the second Deputies front waistband. The Deputies put the drunk in the rear of one of the patrol cars and the Deputy with the drunk, left. The other Deputy got on his radio to order a tow truck.

“Well, it looks like you 3 are in the clear,” Johnny said. “We could bust you for discharging a firearm within the city limits, but under the circumstances, you may just have saved Janice Worth’s life. So, I think we can let it pass. An investigator will be out later to take each of your statements. Do me a favor, guys. I want you to all tell the investigator that you were using shotguns, ok?”

“Shotguns?” Ron replied, “Shotguns it is.”

“Look, you 3 did the right thing, but it isn’t such a good idea to advertise the automatic weapons,” Johnny said. “Sometimes the Sheriff will appoint civilian guards as Deputy Sheriff’s but only for the period that they are on duty. I’ll run that up the chain of command. But, you three will have to get armed guard cards, is that a problem?”

All three men shook their heads indicating that it was not a problem.

“All right. I’m not telling you not to carry your rather extensive arsenal on those golf carts, but until I can get that authority for you and all of the other guards, you fellas should stick to shooting the legal weapons,” Johnny continued, “It’s funny, I was on my way here when the call went out. Let me in, I have something in my trunk I think you three might like to have.”

The Three Amigos moved the golf carts and opened the gate. Clarence put his M16A3 in the rack, took out the shotgun and resumed his duties. Johnny followed Ron and Gary back to 4560. He opened his trunk and told Ron and Gary to put the LAWS Rockets in the garage. They were to give 2 each to each of the 4 households and keep the remainder. Johnny admonished them that the Rockets were only for the most serious emergency, like if the gangs attacked. The husband, he told them before leaving, faced charges of driving while intoxicated, attempting to violate the restraining order, carrying a concealed weapon, criminal trespass and ADW which was what he did when he at-

tempted to push their cars out of the way and run over them. He then left to track down Janice Worth and talk to her.

[Shortly after we moved to California, Sharon had her purse snatched. When the Detectives later showed up, they had no idea what to charge the woman who had the purse, now in her car and had dragged Sharon. They should watch more TV, the charge was ADW and I explained it to them, the car was a deadly weapon. The DA confirmed it and the broad was charged. But Sharon couldn't ID her in the lineup and she went free. I learned that in 3 places: law school, Dragnet and Adam-12. Old episodes of Adam-12 are used for training purposes.]

By the next morning, the story of the events that had occurred that afternoon had made the rounds more than once. The residents were positively friendly. It hadn't hurt that The Three Amigos had taken every effort to see that the interference with the traffic flow hadn't been any more intrusive than necessary to protect the tract. It especially hadn't hurt that due largely to their efforts one of the members of 'the other side' had perhaps had her life saved. In fact, several residents who had not yet resumed work approached Randy and asked to be allowed to return to the guard duty chores. Not everyone was willing to participate but according to the rumor mill (Darlene) the folks had reloaded the magazines for their AK's. Maybe there was hope for this group of residents after all.

The Three Amigos – Chapter 11 – Country Boys

*The preacher man says it's the end of time
And the Mississippi River, she's a-goin' dry...*

*The interest is up and the stock market's down
And you only get mugged if you go downtown...*

*I live back in the woods, you see,
My woman and the kids and the dogs and me...*

*I got a shotgun, a rifle, and a four-wheel drive
And a country boy can survive
Country folks can survive...*

Back in '86-'87 when phase VI of Moon Shadows was being constructed, Avenue R was a 2-lane blacktop and the housing tract was at least ½ mile from the nearest anything. The areas where Ron and Clarence's homes now sat were large empty patches of desert. The morning that the developer actually opened up Phase VI for sale, Gary and Sharon had arrived early hoping to be first in line. The couple in front of them bought 4560 and they were forced to settle for 4548 (Chris and Patti's). Gary wisely put an option on 4560 in case the couple, who were before them in line of, financing fell through. Didn't happen that way. The couple listed their existing home and it sold immediately. The new buyer wanted in quick and that couple was forced to buy a different home in a tract that was further along. Gary was allowed to exercise his option and they ended up with the house they wanted, 4560. Gary and Sharon didn't like 4548 because it had a huge front lawn, a lot to mow, and a postage stamp sized backyard.

In '87 when they moved in, 07Nov87 to be exact, Moon Shadows was out in the country. It was strictly a blue-collar neighborhood at the time, a product of the so-called 'white flight' from LA. As the tract aged, the demographics slowly shifted. That single black family turned into 2 (Kevin, the cop) and by 2004, the tract was about ⅓ original 'white' residents, ⅓ new black residents and ⅓ Hispanic residents. Some homes in the tract turned over more often than a restless sleeper. The house between Gary and Chris was a good example. By 2004, it had had 7 or 8 owners. The house between Chris and Dick and turned over 4-5 times and was sitting empty, again, on 12Nov05 when TSHTF.

Moon Shadows wasn't so isolated anymore in some ways. Avenue R was finally a 4-lane concrete road, and the 2 old houses across Avenue R had been razed. To the west, a few developments had gone in. A large one on the other side of the road beginning at 40th Street and ending at 45th Street, and of course on the other side of 45th Street was Grecian Isles. To the west of that, a small condo tract had gone in plus a large low-income housing area. And, they had even put up a stop light at 47th and R a few years back, finally. But the actual intersection of 47th and R was nothing but empty land on all 4 corners.

It was a zoning thing, wouldn't you know. The City of Palmdale had reserved a strip of land along Palmdale Boulevard for commercial buildings. The boulevard turned into 47th street East at the big curve to the northeast $\frac{1}{3}$ of a mile away, but the commercial zoning extend all of the way south on R to R-4, 4 blocks south of Avenue R. Every time someone tried to build on the commercially zoned property on 47th Street the liberals came out of the woodwork and blocked the project with the City Council.

At the corner of 45th East and R, there was a small lot, maybe an acre or so that still sat empty. Thus on the north and the east Moon Shadows was surrounded by empty land and on the west, almost the complete wall was up against that empty lot. On the south side, some developer had put in homes in a tract that extended from 45th to the commercially zoned strip of land on 47th east. In many ways, in 2006, Moon Shadows was still an island of homes surrounded by desert. The upshot of all this was, given the current disaster, the residents had free fields of fire to the east and north and almost a free field of fire to the west. And to the south, they had a layer of housing to protect their backside.

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To be perfectly honest, Gary didn't care one way or another about some of 'the other side' returning to the fold. They revolted once and pulled out of the smoothly run security operation and he half expected that when the chips were down they might do the same thing again. Common sense was one of those things that had come late in life for old Gar-Bear, and it still wasn't his strongest suit. Ronald was the great people analyst at 4560 and Clarence wasn't far behind. Down the street, Patti was every bit the match for Ron when it came to sizing people up. Darlene was pretty nosey but she was a tad shy on figuring out people. However, since she knew everything about everybody, it sort of made up for her shortcoming. Of the people who lived in Moon Shadows, the original residents were probably the most reliable and could be counted on in a crunch. They had been the last to leave and first to return to the fold. And without exception, they were very quick to volunteer for guard duty, including some who were back at work but thought they owed it to themselves and the tract to participate.

That made 14 families that Ron said they count really count on, the original residents plus Randy and Pam. Randy was well off, a self-made plumbing contractor with bucks to burn. Pam was a high school teacher, born and raised in the Midwest who had ended up in what was then called Newhall where she'd met and married Randy. Newhall was now part of Santa Clarita, physically the 24th largest city in California and 4th largest city in Los Angeles County. Population wise, it didn't come close to a few dozen large cities, but it was a fast growing suburb of LA up until 12Nov05. The population had jumped rather drastically with the FEMA camps in the community, but it still was a city filled with wide-open spaces.

Sunday, 05Feb06...

With a reorganized guard force in place, Moon Shadows felt a little safer, but only marginally so. Patti and Ron had gotten together and they made up the A list, B list and C list which indicated the most trustworthy, A, to the least trustworthy, C, residents. The A list people were given leadership roles in the home guard and the C list people had to be accompanied by an A list or B list person when they pulled duty. The C list people were probably only in the group because of some perceived peer pressure thing. The B list people had their hearts in the right place but they were the people that Patti and Ron couldn't decide to put on the A or C lists. In fact, they were probably a little bit of both. There was no more talk about 'the other side' but it undoubtedly still existed.

Gary had a military field manual on his computer pertaining to the use of the M72 LAWS Rockets and he printed out a few copies for them to study. Those rifle grenades had a greater effective range than the LAW's, but the LAW's was a 66mm projectile. These particular 30 Rockets were the M72A3 models with extra 0.4-pounds of explosive. Developed for use during the Vietnam War but had later been replaced by the 84mm M136 AT-4.

Both weapons were single-use disposable Rockets. They studied the minimum and maximum ranges of the weapons, how to extend the tube to prepare the weapons for firing and so forth. They found that some of the folks were a little short when it came to their ability to judge distances. Another trip to the Golf course solved that problem. In the sport shop, they found some Bushnell Yardage Pro Sport Laser Rangefinders that were good out to 800 yards. They also borrowed 3 more golf carts and left another Manny, Moe and Jack note right beside the first note.

Palmdale was your typical city with a Radio Shack every couple of miles and they managed to come up with a pretty good assortment of the FRS/GMRS radios to outfit the guard force. On top of that, Ron had been into CB radios heavily at one time and he had a large box of the 40-channel radios over at his house. It wasn't too hard to adapt the 13.8 volt radios to run off the golf cart batteries. The 6 golf carts were equipped with the CB's and Ron's Uniden President base station went into the OP. It had been a simple matter to pull the ring and turn the electric meter at 4542, the Klein house, to provide electricity. In fact, Lorrie and David and their kids had moved into 4542 to alleviate the overcrowding at 4560. Thus the OP duties fell to that group of folks.

Johnny came by from time to time to visit his kids, but he had no more presents for them. He did, however, have more news. Those gangsters were burning through the Inland Empire faster than expected and the military wasn't having much luck containing them. It wasn't totally true that Johnny came totally empty handed; sometimes he had a case or part case of 5.56 ammo, and other times some tear gas, CS or flash-bang grenades. It was riot control stuff, but it might come in handy in a pinch. The Three Amigos weren't about to turn down any freebies. The more things they accumulated, the more confusing it became, too. Finally they mounted a tray/open box on the golf carts and used Sharon's label maker to label what each device did.

There hadn't been any more incidents like the one with the drunken husband and those

C list people soon lost interest and they were permanently scratched from the roster of people who would participate in protecting the tract. And, any indecisiveness that Ron and Patti had about those folks on the B list was likewise resolved. Some of them were permanently dropped and some made the A list. The well to do plumber, Randy, went to the folks who had been dropped and bought back the AK's so they could be put to better use. In many cases the buyback price was low because these people hadn't had the full price in the first place and Randy had helped them out. With the buyback, the weapons were redistributed to the A list households and time was spent to familiarize the folks with the weapons. They even found a place to shoot less than a mile from the housing tract and the A list folks became reasonably proficient in the use of the weapons.

The situation on this 5th day of February was pretty straightforward. Half of the residents were deeply involved in protecting the housing tract and the other half expected to be protected. It is hard to say how that stacked up with anyone's expectations.

"I got to tell you, having those extra golf carts has been a real Godsend," Clarence opined.

"They aren't going to reopen that golf course anytime in the near future," Ron said, "Maybe we should go pick up another half dozen carts."

"We'd better look around for some batteries, too Ron," Gary suggested. "If we came up with some battery chargers and inverters, we could fix up the A list families with some backup electricity in case the power goes down again."

"Now you're thinking," Ron said. "I'll maybe scrounge around for a couple of generators too, so they can recharge those batteries. Maybe one generator for every 3 or 4 households."

"Well, if you find generators, you'd better get plenty of fuel for them," Clarence advised.

"Why don't you take care of that Clarence?" Ron suggested. "Find some used 55-gallon drums and fill them up. I'll kick in some money for gas."

"I can do a little gas money, too," Gary agreed. "You're the shortest on funds, so maybe you can just contribute your labor, Clarence. I'll go talk to Randy and Pam to see if they want to get in on this."

Randy and Pam had not been idle. In the period since they had returned to the tract, Randy had withdrawn a substantial sum from his business checking account and they had made several improvements to their home. Randy could easily afford the 10,000-gallon water tank, the 30kw generator and the 5,500-gallon propane tank that he bought outright. A contractor friend had dug up their back yard and put in a shelter that filled the entire backyard, double the size of Gary's shelter. The hardest part had been finding food to stock the shelter, but Randy knew a lot of people and a few well-placed dollars

had taken care of that through a grocery wholesaler friend of his. Randy had made his own trip to see Sandy, too and he had loaded up on M1A's, AR15's, M1911's and ammo. His shelter was far better stocked than Gary's. But, though his shelter was only twice the size of Gary's, it had cost him nearly 6 times as much. That was the price one paid for being a Johnny-come-lately. Randy peeled off a handful of \$100's and told Gary to get all the gasoline they could find and afford.

So that Sunday afternoon, Ron went golfing and Clarence took Dave's pickup and trailer, Dave had never returned home, and went in search of 55-gallon drums. Ron and Chris took the car trailer and they returned with the last 8 golf carts, bringing the total to 20, and a lot of batteries. It appeared that the golf course had been in the process of replacing most of the 6 batteries in the carts and they had a lot of new batteries still in the boxes. What was it that Travis Dane had said in *Under Siege 2*?

Clarence came up with 14 drums, all that Dave's pickup and trailer would hold. The 770 gallons of gas had been a little hard to come by, harder than the drums, and it had cost \$3,000, but their preparations were getting better.

06Feb06...

They were out early this morning. They had acquired 120 deep cycle batteries at the golf course, but that didn't give them but 6 batteries per household. Then again, Gary and Randy didn't need batteries, so that left an extra 12 batteries to divide among the remaining 18 A list homes. They were going to need 5 generators, 5 battery chargers, and either 18 heavy-duty inverters or a passel of lighter duty inverters. Chris had a hand crank oil pump for a 55-gallon drum so that solved the problem of getting the gasoline out of the drums. They set out this Monday morning armed with a pocketful of cash, thanks to Randy, and a short shopping list. Clarence had seen 6 more drums so he took Dave's pickup and went after them and more gasoline. The full drums had been unloaded from the pickup using Chris's shop crane. 55-gallons of gas went about 450 pounds, you know.

They spent the entire day shopping. The drums and gas were easy, because all that took was money. The generators proved to be more elusive, but their persistence paid off and they came up with 5 6kw gasoline fueled generators. The deep cycle batteries were equally elusive, but in the end, they had a grand total, including the 120 batteries from the golf course, of 360 batteries. A RV business had been the source of the inverters; that part had been easy. Pep Boys had plenty of battery chargers and they got units big enough to take full advantage of the 6kw the generators would provide. Some of the businesses had been open and they paid for those purchases. Others were closed and they saw fit to leave a Manny, Moe and Jack note. It seemed especially fitting that they had done so at the Pep Boys store that was locked up tighter than a drum. They had 1,100 gallons of gasoline, everyone's propane tanks were full as were everyone's propane bottles; or at least among the 20 A list families.

It was ironic, in more way than one. The people who were back to work were the long-

term residents. They were already putting in long hours on their jobs between the work time and the commute time. But these people found the time to pull guard duty and participate in the things important to the needs of the tract. The other 19 families, none of whom was working, had plenty of time and could have participated. But they just sat on their hind ends waiting for their next dole of food from the government. The more things change, the more they stay the same. And these same good for nothing people weren't shy about asking to 'borrow' a cup of sugar or flour or gallon of milk when they ran out. The 20 A list folks just smiled and said things like, "Sorry, fresh out," or a similar reply. These same folks were saving back a small portion of the food they were getting from the government too and could have easily supplied the deadbeats with what they needed.

A person doesn't get to choose his neighbors, but that didn't mean that they had to associate with them either. There were clearly two camps in Moon Shadows, the haves and the have-nots. The haves were the industrious folks on the A list, in case you're uncertain.

12Feb06...

Over the course of the past 6 days, the 18 homes were all outfitted with 20 batteries each and an inverter. Realizing that they had screwed up, Ron and Chris had gone back to Pep Boys and picked up 18 trickle chargers to keep the battery banks topped of while power was available. They wired an extension cord into the furnaces and had run heavy-duty extension cords to the kitchens. When needed, the extension cords could be plugged into the inverters and provide power to the furnace and some power to the kitchen. They had loaded up on candles and Coleman unleaded gas lanterns to provide light, too. It was a just in case thing. Johnny was by again to see the kids. He didn't spend long with them however; he wanted to visit with the reestablished Council of 4.

"What's the Situation in Berdoo?" Chris asked.

"Not good Chris," Johnny said. "Those gangsters have formed up and are attacking the troops on the north side of town. It looks like they're trying to make a breakout on I-215. It's really hard to say how long the military can hold out."

"Why the hell isn't the President supplying more federal troops?" Gary asked.

"Doesn't have them to supply would be my guess," Johnny answered. "I suppose that explains the semi-blackout of news."

"That's a fine bit of news," Clarence observed, "Do you have any more good news for us?"

"The President has been busy issuing Executive Orders," Johnny remarked, "But the distribution is very limited. Our Department only gets copies of those orders that directly affect us."

“Why do I get the feeling that you’re holding back on us?” Gary asked.

“You are familiar with USA Patriot Act II, right?” Johnny asked.

“Yeah sure Johnny,” Gary laughed, “I wrote about it in one of my stories.”

“I’m not talking about your fiction here Gary,” Johnny said, “I’m talking about the real USA Patriot Act II. You can download it off the Internet you know. It’s a fairly quick download.”

“Never heard of it,” Gary said.

“Well, after the election in 2004, Congress dusted it off and they passed it,” Johnny explained. “It was Dubya’s bill but he was waiting until after the election to put pressure on Congress to adopt it. He must have been afraid of a backlash. Anyway, despite Kerry’s objections, the bill passed both houses of Congress with such an overwhelming majority that Kerry had no choice except to sign it into law. Read the law boys; it will scare you to death.”

“I can’t take any more good news,” Ron groaned, “Do you have any bad news?”

“Now that you mention it Ron,” Johnny said, “I do.”

“Me and my big mouth,” Ron lamented. “Well...”

“You remember the former Bill of Rights don’t you?” Johnny asked.

“Former?” Gary snapped, “What the...?”

“Temporarily suspended by Executive Order,” Johnny shook his head.

“He can’t do that,” Gary insisted.

“You mean he can’t get away with it Gary,” Johnny said, “And you’d be right. But until the Supreme Court rules on it and knocks it down, we’re going to have to live with it.”

“But some federal court will issue a stay order and the Executive Order will be blocked,” Gary insisted.

“You would think so, but it is not going to happen, Gary,” Johnny insisted. “You’d have to read the exact wording of the Executive Order to understand why. Kerry didn’t make a frontal attack on the Bill of Rights, he used PA I and PA II and some pretty free interpretations of those laws to do the deed. Individually, each provision is well within his rights as President. Taken as a whole, they essentially suspend the Bill of Rights.”

“Well I’ll be a SOB,” Gary said shaking his head.

“The ATF and FEMA are getting more aggressive too,” Johnny pointed out, “That’s how I got those M203’s and grenades from Sandy. I warned her off an ATF sting.”

“What say fellas,” Gary remarked, “Let’s go off the wagon and tie a real one on.”

“I’d do that Gar-Bear,” Ron laughed, “But there ain’t enough booze in Palmdale to finish off that drunk so I’ll pass. You will too, partner.”

“Amen,” Clarence said.

This was not exactly what one would call a good news day. Gary went out and checked the net and found all kinds of references to PA II. He had dreamed up a PA II for one of his stories, but had never known that the truth was worse than the fiction. And the more he got into the legislation, the more he realized that the nightmare scenario he’d dreamed up paled in comparison to the real thing. It was easy to see where the President could take a snip here and a snip there and actually suspend the Bill of Rights. It wouldn’t last, but was even a moment without a basic freedom a short time? He thought not. Maybe they needed to be more worried about the White House, er Mt. Weather, than the gang bangers.

Not so, it was a question of priorities. All of the freedom in the world wouldn’t do you a bit of good if you were dead. It was a shame about the 19 families who didn’t want to participate in protecting the tract, but they were better off without them. At least the 20 families who made up the A list were dedicated and they wouldn’t shrink from giving defense of the tract their all. The Three Amigos had gotten to know all of these people, it was their way of making sure that the people belonged on the A list, and to a man, they were convinced that the people would be in there pitching.

One of the themes he’d always made in his fiction was the reference to George S. Patton and Patton’s assertion that “Fixed fortifications are monuments to man’s stupidity.” Maybe that was true if you were fighting the German Army, but when all you had were the concrete block walls around the housing tract, what could you do? They had added homemade concertina, but had they overlooked anything? The north wall wasn’t particularly accessible because the developer had put in a ditch for the storm drains to run-off into and a 6’ high wrought iron fence surrounded the deep ditch. That side was reasonably defensible. The south side of the tract was up against the other housing tract and it, too, wasn’t much of a concern. The west wall was 6’ high but in the open and that east wall was barely 5’ high. Maybe what they needed was a front-end loader to pile some dirt up against those walls. And, in the process, maybe the operator could create a ditch of some kind that would have the effect of making the walls more inaccessible.

Randy was the plumbing contractor with all of the connections and the big bucks, so The Three Amigos, after discussing Gary’s concerns about the east and west walls, went to talk to Randy.

“What can I do for The Three Amigos today?” Randy asked. “Need more money for another project?”

“Maybe money, Randy,” Ron said, “But more than that, we need advice. Gary pointed out that the north wall is pretty well protected by that ditch but the east and west walls are in the open. He had some idea about pushing dirt up against the walls and creating a ditch in front of them to make the walls effectively higher.”

“Cat got your tongue Gary?” Randy asked.

“No Randy, but Ron expressed my belief pretty well, what do you think?” Gary replied.

“I’ve had a few nightmares about the wall behind my place,” Randy said, “But you maybe have hit upon a solution. The ditch isn’t a bad idea, but I’d rather have the dirt inside to absorb anything that hit the wall. But that really isn’t practical because of the 19 gold-bricks. Maybe I could talk to a contractor friend and get some ideas from him.”

“Whatever you can do would be better than what we have.” Gary agreed.

Randy talked to a couple of contractors in Palmdale and the best solution offered was to put in a wood wall in front of the block wall. Then they could use an excavator and fill the space between the two walls with dirt excavated out to form a ditch. The fence, it was suggested, could be built out of the same prefab panels that some developers used to put in fences between properties in their developments. All that would take would be some post holes, some 4x4’s, the panels and a few nails. Randy went back to The Three Amigos and outlined the idea. They could put in the postholes and set the posts, which he would provide. They could then put in the fence sections; Chris was pretty good at that, he reminded them.

The contractor who had suggested the idea owed Randy a lot of favors, he said, and the guy would do the excavating and fill in the fence area if they could get the fence up before Wednesday. He had taken the liberty of ordering the posts and fencing, he explained, but they were going to have to work fast to have that fence up before Wednesday. Obviously, Randy hadn’t seen Chris do fences. They started at dawn the next morning and before the delivery truck arrived with the fencing and posts, had the holes in. Being he wasn’t worried about good side/bad side, Chris and Matt were able to keep up with the people setting the posts. It only took 8 nails to hold a fence section in place. By sundown the same day, the fencing was up on both ends of the housing tract. The slowest part of the process turned out to be auguring the dirt out of the postholes.

Tuesday was a down day waiting for the excavator to complete the project. It was also Valentine’s Day. There was no place to get candy, flowers or a card. The ladies obviously realized this and nothing was said. Gary had had time to think about this situation with John Kerry and the USA Patriot Act II. The more he thought about the subject the angrier he became. That jerk from Massachusetts with his cronies Teddy, Hillary and

Chuckie, had probably gotten together with John McCain and a few others and were planning the overthrow of the government. They'd want to turn it over to the UN or something.

Whoa there Gar-Bear, don't lose sight of the priorities. *Rebellion to tyrants is obedience to God.* John Bradshaw (1602–1659), British lawyer, regicide. Motto. Inscription at Bradshaw's final burial place near Martha Bay, Jamaica. Bradshaw, the President of the Parliamentary Commission which tried and sentenced King Charles I, was originally buried in Westminster Abbey, but his remains, along with those of Cromwell and Ireton, were dug up in 1660, and hanged at Tyburn, London, where rebels and common criminals were executed. Both Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson were attributed with sayings similar to Bradshaw's epitaph, and the words appeared on Jefferson's seal.

The excavating contractor showed up at first light on Wednesday and with the equipment he had, they had a ditch and the fence filled by lunchtime. By 4pm the west end, being a little shorter, was also done. Another layer of security had been added to Moon Shadows Phase VI. In a way, however, Patton was right. There is a limit to what you can do to get a housing tract ready to repel attackers. And, another point should be made. They really had no idea what to expect from these attackers, assuming they came. If they had ransacked armories in Los Angeles, they could be armed with about any weapon in the CNG arsenal. And if the US Army was having trouble with these gangsters, what hope was there for a housing tract with only 20 families participating in the defense? About all they had going in their favor was home field advantage. Unlike Gary's fiction they didn't have M14, M16 or M18 mines. Hmm, home field advantage.

Maybe the answer lay elsewhere. Maybe they needed to take the battle to the enemy. The enemy, in this case the gang bangers, wouldn't be on their home turf. They would be in unfamiliar territory. With the 3 sniper rifles, the suppressed Super Match M1A's, maybe they could pick off some of the gangsters before they ever got to Palmdale.

"Ronald, who are our best shots?" Gary asked.

"Got me partner, not the 3 of us, that's for sure," Ron replied, 'Why?'"

"Well, if those gangsters come up 138, there are dozens of good ambush spots. With those Super Match rifles and the suppressors, a good marksman could take out several of the bad guys and slow them down," Gary thought out loud. "We need to find out immediately who can handle those 3 rifles the best. We also have the suppressed 16A4's so we could arm the spotter with a suppressed weapon too. I believe that if we have them spooked by the time they get to Palmdale, we'll be a whole lot better off."